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# KUNAPIPI

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# Kunapipi



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# Kunapipi

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VOLUME I NUMBER I

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The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

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# Editorial

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ANNA RUTHERFORD

If I may begin by quoting from my foreword in *Common Wealth* (1971):

When one reads the literature of the Commonwealth one finds a constant interaction of forces, in opposition but also conjoined, for all struggle is a form of conjunction. In every development some part of the old must yield to the new for destruction is an essential part of the process of creation, essential for nothing stays alive unless it is continually being reborn and recreated by the imagination. This regenerative spirit seems to me to be one of the vital forces at work in Commonwealth writing today. It is for this reason that I have chosen the entwined serpent as the emblem for the cover. As such it is a symbol of the synthesis of opposing powers, of life-in-death and death-in-life, of inheritor and maker, of creation and destruction, of constant renewal, continuity and life.

I hope that *Kunapipi* is evidence of this regenerative spirit and that the new name and emblem are indications of my intentions. The emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia. The shield is in the collection of aboriginal art belonging to the South Australian museum. It is described by F. D. McCarthy in *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* and Ronald M. Berndt in *Australian Aboriginal Art*. Berndt suggests that 'it is possibly associated with the mythical rock python and used in Kunapipi (Gunabibi) rituals'. He continues, 'It may represent the female counterpart of Lightning, husband of Kunapipi, the Great Mother, in his snake form. In other contexts it might refer to the rainbow snake, which has both male and female manifestations'. McCarthy suggests that 'it rep-



resents the ancestral snake, Julungal [the rainbow serpent] who had swallowed the Wawalag sisters in the historical re-enactment of the Gunabibi (Kunapipi) ceremony'.

When the decision was made to make certain changes to *Cammergalth Newsletter* in terms of content we decided that this would also be a good time to change both the name and format. But what to call it? I suddenly knew what parents went through choosing a name for their new child. Then one day, whilst going through the aboriginal art books for something else, I came upon the picture of the shield which I have used for the emblem. And this led me to *Kunapipi*. So many people have asked 'Why Kunapipi?' that I feel I should say a few words about the Rainbow Serpent and the myths connected with it.

For the aborigines the Rainbow Serpent stands out above the rest of the totemic ancestors because of its particular concern with the regeneration of nature and human fertility. 'In the Mother cults of Arnhem Land the Great Snake is sometimes identified with the mother herself, sometimes with her male companions, sometimes with both. In many places "his" sex is not clear and in Australia as in other parts of the world the snake symbolises the ambisexuality of the creator. There is also a creation-destruction polarity about the concept of the Rainbow Snake' (Roslyn Poignant, *Oceanic Mythology*).

Above earth his body arches across the sky as the rainbow; on earth he is to be found in the deep rock pools and waterholes which are the reservoirs of the life-giving rain he has sent down. His name varies from region to region and the myths connected with him are numerous. One name for him is Julunggul and it is under this name that we find one of the most famous of the myths connected with the Rainbow Serpent, that of the Wawalag sisters. In *Oceanic Mythology* Roslyn Poignant records the Milingimbi version of the Wawalag myth as told to L. Warner. The Wawalag sisters are travelling through Southern Arnhem Land and eventually camp by a water hole sacred to Gulunggul.

They prepared their food but as soon as they placed each animal and plant on the fire it jumped out and dived into the waterhole because it had taken on the sacredness of the well. Then the elder sister went to fetch water and profaned the pool with her menstrual blood. The great snake rose up in anger and the water spilled from the well and flooded the countryside – the rain fell. At last the women realised their danger and tried to stop the rain and the advance of the great snake towards them by singing and dancing. Whenever they paused he moved forward. At last they fell asleep and he swallowed them.

Again he raised himself to the sky and all the other great pythons of the other centres also raised themselves up. The great snakes talked together about the ritual they shared although they spoke different languages. Then they told each other what they had just eaten. When it came to Yurlungur's turn he was ashamed and at first refused to say, but at last he admitted to having eaten the two sisters and their children. Then he fell down, splitting the ground, and spewed up the women and children. Green ants bit them and revived them. Again he swallowed them and again he regurgitated them, and each time he rose up and fell down he made a ceremonial ground for each of the great rituals with which this myth is associated. The most important of these ceremonies are the Djunggawon or Djungguan, the Kunapipi or Gunabibi, and the Ngurlmak, or Ulmark. . . . In each the central theme of the myth, namely the swallowing and regurgitation of the sisters by the snake is ritually represented. In the Kunapipi the ceremonial ground stands for the body of the great snake and a hole is dug to represent the sacred well. Later a crescent-shaped trench is dug which is the hollow made by the great snake's fall, and also symbolises the womb of the Mother. . . . In the same ceremony the voice of the snake is the sound of the bullroarer and is called Mumuna. This is an alternative name for Kunapipi, the Great Mother, and it is also one of the names given to the Lightning Snake.

There are alternative names and versions of the myth and links can be made with other myths and rites throughout the whole area. What they all show is the concern with fertility which finds expression in the interlocking images of the Great Mother and the Rainbow Serpent. This I hope explains the choice of emblem and title.

To me it all seemed extremely appropriate. The regenerative spirit is stressed, a link is established between the old world and

the new, between ancient cultures and those of the twentieth century.

You will see that we are broadening the scope of the magazine by including creative writing as well as critical work. We also hope to publish the work of artists. And whilst the major concentration will no doubt be on the present and former Commonwealth countries, in no way is this exclusive. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics will also be included. The Spring issue of each year will contain a review of the major literary events in the various regions.

Finally a practical note. As must be immediately obvious it is much more expensive to produce *Kanapipi* and therefore we have had to raise subscription rates. However, we hope that you will agree that given the quality of the magazine they are very low indeed.

We can only continue with this present format if you help us. One way you can do this is by getting your university library (should you have one) to subscribe.

## Mark O'Connor

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### THE RAINBOW SERPENT

(A sequence of poems on Hinchinbrook Island, designed to accompany a photographic exhibition by Jeremy Carew-Reid.)

## I. TCH'MALA

His mass is mountains. Speed snails the wind.  
Roar is elder brother of the sea's blood-purr.  
His rumble from Mission Beach down past Murdering Point  
is a palm's back-sway, a taipan's long hiss.

His trails are the endless oncomings of mist  
low into the water-choked valleys. His mirror  
the mountain slopes shiny with rain. His cave  
of retreat is dry season's maker; his  
accompanist, the wilful drub of rain that greets  
the giant-toad's rasping heat-cry.

Though he break the good trees with the wind of his tail,  
through him are all hatchlings and fruit. Grass-renewer,  
his sperm are the eels that fall from Heaven. He re-stocks  
the island, fills the rock-holes above 'falls. Through him  
what survives is reborn in water.

His aftersign is the bridge of beauty  
glimpsed through shifting cloud.

His faithful are buried in hills and settlements.

\* \* \*

TCH'MALA: The Rainbow Serpent. A monsoonal deity of North  
Australian aboriginal mythology.



*Randolph Stow.*

Photograph by Michael Scott.

# Denmark in the Indian Ocean, 1616-1845

## An Introduction

'Vi må ro med de årer, vi har'.

Governor Willum Leyel of Tranquebar, 1644.

The Danish East Indian Company grew out of the ambitions of Christian IV, who in 1616 found himself with a new chancellor, Friis-Kragerup, less restraining than his predecessor. But if the ambition was Christian's, the initiative came from two Dutchmen, Jan de Willum and Herman Rosenkrantz, who first put forward the idea in 1615 and won a circle of Copenhagen merchants to their side. In an open letter of March 17, 1616, King Christian gave permission for Danish subjects to establish an East Indian Company in Copenhagen in order to engage in trade with the East Indies, China and Japan.

Two other Dutchmen played important roles: Roland Crappe, who had established good relations with the ruler of Tanjore, and Marchelis de Boshouwer, who was in even better standing with the King of Candy in Ceylon. Boshouwer claimed to be authorised to conclude agreements on the Sinhalese king's behalf; and on March 30, 1618, such an agreement was signed between Christian IV and 'the Emperor of Ceylon'. Under the treaty, valid for seven years, Denmark was to protect Ceylon with a warship and 300 foot-soldiers, for which she would be compensated. The peoples of Denmark and Ceylon would have free access to each other's countries, and the King of Candy would at least not obstruct the

conversion of Asians to Christianity according to the Augsburg Confession.

In another instrument of August 2, 1618, Boshouwer agreed with the Danish East Indian Company that Denmark and Ceylon should invest in a joint company with two presidents and twelve directors, and with two general offices, in Copenhagen and Ceylon. The civil rights of Danes and Ceylonese in each other's countries were again guaranteed.

The matter of capital was and remained a serious problem. The chief individual investor was the King, with 16,000 rixdollars. Danish, Norwegian, Dutch and German citizens and towns also contributed; but by 1620 the Company's capital was only 180,000 rixdollars, immensely far short of the Dutch VOC's initial 6½ million guilders.

But long before the financial arrangements became clear, the Danish expedition to the Indies was already under way. There were five ships in all: three from the Company, and two warships from the Crown. One of the latter, the *David*, was to be placed at Ceylon's disposal, while the other, the *Elephant*, was to help the civilian ships prosecute trade and establish colonies and strongholds elsewhere in the Indies.

The yacht *Ørmen* was the first to leave, in August 1618. The rest of the fleet followed in November. The Commandeur of the expedition was a nobleman from Skåne, Ove Gjedde, a protégé of Friis-Kragerup and only twenty-four years old. His second-in-command was Erik Grubbe, an investor in the Company. Erik was in love, and his family opposed the marriage. So, in traditional fashion, his Ingelborg came aboard disguised as a page, and they were married before sailing. At the Cape, Ingelborg gave birth to a son, christened Capo de Bona Esperanza, but known as Afrika Grubbe. In the Indian Ocean, however, mother and baby both died, like about 300 other members of the expedition, for it was a hard voyage. Erik Grubbe's later behaviour can be explained by this blow.

On May 16, 1620, Ove Gjedde noted that they had seen the promised land, Ceylon, with great joy. The joy did not last long. He found that Boshouwer, who had signed treaties on behalf of 'the Emperor of Ceylon', meant only the King of Candy, and that that king, one of several, had concluded a peace treaty with the Portuguese three years earlier. Moreover, Roland Crappe in the *Øresund* had come to grief in battle with the Portuguese, and some of his men had been hanged as pirates. Crappe himself, with thirteen other men, had escaped into the protection of the ruler of Tanjore.

Gjedde decided to open negotiations with the King of Candy for ratification of Boshouwer's treaty and repayment of Denmark's outlay on his behalf. The King sent word that Boshouwer, who had died after leaving the Cape, was an impostor. Gjedde went in person to the king, and after vainly trying promises, used threats. The king gave way, and on August 21, 1620, signed a new treaty, ceding Trincomalee to Denmark and granting generous commercial privileges, including freedom from tax and the right to mint coins. He also gave the Danes permission to build strongholds where they wished, and to introduce Christianity to Trincomalee. Gjedde was well satisfied.

Leaving some Danes to lay out a fort and collect goods for the return journey, Gjedde went north to the Coromandel Coast and Tranquebar, a little fishing town which Roland Crappe thought might be acquired by Denmark from the 'Naik' (or 'Nayak') of Tanjore, a minor Tamil state. After delays caused by Gjedde's rather arrogant treatment of the Naik, Tranquebar was indeed ceded to Denmark for two years. Thereafter the Naik would receive rent. The Danes would build a fort at Tranquebar with the help of the Naik's people, and have sole rights to trade, untaxed, in Tanjore; though an exception was made for the Portuguese of Negapatam.

Gjedde immediately began work on the fort, designed by himself and called Dansborg. He then began to prepare for the return



voyage, though he was by now so short of money that he had to give the Naik some cannon in exchange for pepper. The *David* sailed first, bound for Socotra with a clear hint that some piracy on the way would be acceptable to King and Company. Gjedde, with the *Elephant* and other ships, returned to Ceylon.

Here he found that no progress at all had been made with the fort at Trincomalee. The most positive achievement was that Erik Grubbe, who was getting odder, had struck some Danish money – with his own name on it.

Erik was in a strange state. On May 9, 1621, Gjedde sent him to Candy to persuade the king to do something about honouring the treaty. He was to return in a week, and the *Elephant* was then immediately to sail home. But he never returned. After a long wait, Gjedde was obliged to leave.

Erik Grubbe, all this time, was hiding in the jungle near Trincomalee. He was not interested in going home, and he never did. He lived, it seems, by hunting wild animals, in company with his servant Svend Due. Danish ships regularly looked out for them. After two years, Svend actually visited a Danish ship, and a year later he and Erik both came on board the *Pearl*. This mediocval wild men's life lasted for perhaps five years. We know that Erik was back in Tranquebar in 1626, when he was sent on a mission to the Great Mogul, which never happened because Denmark could not afford the presents. He died at Tranquebar in 1631, one of the strangest Europeans in Indian Ocean history.

Ove Gjedde had reached Copenhagen on March 4, 1623, saying 'God's name be endlessly honoured'. He was still only twenty-eight, and his achievement had been considerable. But not in financial terms. Two good ships and hundreds of men had been lost, and the cargo brought home did not even cover expenses.

In the years immediately following, under the direction of Roland Crappe, Danish India's future was sketched out. There was conflict at times with the Naik, but the Danes endeared themselves to him by keeping the English out of Tanjore. The English and Dutch, for their part, were more patronising than hostile.

Some promising treaties, like those with the kings of Candy and Siam, proved to be worth little or nothing; however, Denmark did acquire five factories (*kantorer*) besides Tranquebar: in Macassar ('a poor factory', said the English), at Pipely in Bengal, Balasore in Orissa, Masulipatam in Andhra Pradesh, and either Bantam in Java or Sukadana in Borneo. But Tranquebar was nevertheless almost desperately poor: in money, ships and manpower. The Dutch and English could afford to tolerate a rival which received from the homeland only one or two ships a year, if that. By 1629 Crappe had almost decided to sell Dansborg to the Dutch for 15,000 pieces of eight; but this came to nothing, perhaps because of the Naik's anti-Dutch prejudice.

On the credit side, Tranquebar had in Dansborg a very handsome fortress, built by Tamil bricklayers faster and more expert than those in Europe. The informative Icelandic Jón Ólafsson, who served in it when it was new, tells us how fine it was. Pictures of various dates confirm this; but more often than not, we know from Danish sources, it was delapidated.

The architectural rot set in while Crappe's shady successor as Commandeur was in debtors' prison in Masulipatam, and Tranquebar was in thrall to two drunken crazy *prester* (ministers of religion), Niels Andersen Udbyneder and Christen Pedersen Storm, both of them with native wives described as 'whores'. Niels Andersen in his cups would run around almost naked committing grievous bodily harm on all and sundry. His approach was ecumenical: among his victims were Eurasian Catholics, Hindus, Moslems and Danish officers, including the Commandant. He caused the deaths of several women. Once, drunk, he fell asleep in the pulpit while delivering a sermon, and on being wakened by a soldier his first words were: 'Fill her up, this is for Hr Stackenborg'. This became a catch-phrase at drinking parties throughout India, to the great shame of Denmark.

Under Governor Willum Leyel, Christen Pedersen Storm was condemned to death for his offences, which included causing the death of his wife. The method of execution was odd: he was sewn

in a sack and dropped into the sea, 'north of Dansborg, about a mile from land'.

Even more curiously, the vicious Niels Andersen Udbyneder was reprieved at the intercession of the native people. His fate was merely to be marooned in Ceylon.

In this period of the 1640s, Tranquebar was in sore straits. Local mismanagement had left Dansborg run-down and the Company in heavy debt to merchants in Masulipatam and elsewhere, so inhibiting country trade. The European population was tiny, and the difficulties of Denmark and Christian IV at home had almost cut communications.

The new Governor, Willum Leyel, found a sort of solution, which may have owed something to folk-memories of Danegeld. The Danes considered themselves owed compensation by Bengal for the loss of certain vessels and their cargoes. Not getting it, Leyel embarked on a pirate-war against Bengal, and with his few Europeans and mostly tiny country ships had such unexpected success that Bengal gave in and offered compensation of 80,000 rupees, which was refused. The Danes were using Mafia tactics; but as Leyel, who was given to proverbs, once remarked: '*Vi må ro med de årer, vi har* – We must row with the oars we have'. Whether bullying paid, we do not exactly know. Probably not, as the bullying Dutch, by now the supreme power in the area, strongly disapproved of these Danish adventures. But by one means and another Leyel managed in these difficult years not only to repair but to improve Dansborg, and to produce gunpowder by a new method so efficient that the surplus was available for export.

But profits were so small that in 1650 the Company was liquidated. The next year, an Englishman wrote from Madras that 'the Danes are quite blown up'. Though King Frederik III made encouraging noises occasionally, the situation in Tranquebar was desperate. A cry for help from the Commandant, the only Dane left there, was heard at last in 1668, and the warship *Fære* was sent out, the first ship from Denmark for 29 years. It found the *Dannebrog* still flying, and made a commercially successful trip. As a

result, a new East Indian Company was formed, and received its charter on November 28, 1670. The royal family invested loyally, and the King put Dansborg at the Company's disposal, as well as two ships (for the first six years) on easy terms. Meanwhile, in India, the Naik made over to the Company three more villages, and the vice-commandant proudly sent Christian V a present of a rhinoceros. Old trading links were temporarily renewed; the slave-trade with Indonesia, unfortunately, getting a fresh boost. The European population of Tranquebar, especially the military population, was vastly increased.

The combination of royal favour with war in Europe and India brought Tranquebar its first period of prosperity in the years 1687-1704. From 1691, manpower grew greatly. In the seventeen years of boom, as many as thirty ships arrived from Denmark. Besides cargoes sent back to Europe, an important country trade was conducted with Malacca and Atjeh: in, among other commodities, slaves. During times of famine, Indians would sell themselves or their dependants, or would be sold by their creditors or by the Naik of Tanjore. A quarrel with the Naik in 1698 diverted that supply, and Tranquebar was soon to regret this. By way of compensation, however, a peace treaty with Bengal in the same year gave permission for the building of a new factory on the Hooghly River. This *lege*, Danmarksnagore, prepared the way for Denmark's second Indian colony. But in a long short term, it meant merely enormous expense and trouble, extending even to war with the Great Mogul.

By that time (1714) Tranquebar was again in deep decline, for reasons following a pattern by now familiar. Threats were uttered, but nothing was done immediately, when Danmarksnagore was besieged by the Bengalis. They sacked it after the Danes had fled by sea.

Meanwhile, Tranquebar was fulfilling a new role, as headquarters of the Lutheran mission to the whole of India. The history of the Danish Mission is too large to go into here; but it is worth

noting that one of its later representatives, Christian Friedrich Schwartz, is regarded by the British historian of India, Percival Spear, as being almost the Light of Asia in person: a brightness in centuries of gloom. The idea of the Mission is credited to Frederik IV, but royal patronage did not protect its servants from the hostility and contempt of Company men, either in Copenhagen or in India. The first two missionaries, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, arrived in Tranquebar in 1706, both of them young Germans from Halle, as became traditional. They were treated abominably by the Danes, because, initially, they threatened the institution of slavery.

During Denmark's war with Sweden Tranquebar had sunk back into stagnation. It had regained Danmarksnaogore in 1720, but Danmarksnaogore was merely a drain on a drained colony. In Copenhagen, the Company asked the State for help; and the State, refusing, offered instead the advice of a Commission. The Commission criticised everyone for incompetence and missed opportunities, and found the Company to all intents and purposes bankrupt. In October 1729 Tranquebar learned that the King had taken over everything, and that the second Company had ceased to exist.

But royal favour and some prosperous voyages by individual investors saved the situation, and in 1731 the Danish Asiatic Company received its charter, valid for forty years. Its terms were very familiar, though something new and resented was the strict economies it forced on Tranquebar. Because of this penny-pinching, Dansborg's walls crumbled, and the soldiers were so hungry that half of the Europeans deserted en masse.

Tanjore was also in decline, and in 1737 was invaded by Mogul troops, whom the Danes, like the neighbouring Dutch, had to buy off with presents. But then, perhaps, a little embarrassingly, came a Maratha army and relieved Tanjore. The Danes went back to paying tribute to the ruler, but at a lower rate than before, because of his weakness. They also acquired two extra villages in their enclave.

A few advances were made by the new Company, but they strike one generally as lost opportunities half-recalled. For example, in 1753 a factory was opened in Calicut so that the Danes could enter directly into the Malabar Coast pepper-trade without hindrance from the Dutch, French and British. All this trouble and expense might have been saved if the Danes had not, years before, in a fit of despondency, abandoned their little Malabar Coast factory of Oddaway. While Danish pepper-buyers were stealing about the Coast like characters in a spy-thriller, Oddaway was flying the British flag. Similarly, though the Company's modest and restricted trade with China was good news, one wonders why it took so very many years to achieve what had been intended from the outset.

Another playing of an old tune was the resumption, in 1753, of a Danish trade presence in Bengal, so many years after the abandonment of Danmarksnagore. That factory, almost ruined, had become navigationally unsuitable, but the Nabob at length granted the Company a renewed privilege of trading – in return for a toll of 2½% on all goods bought and sold – and an establishment in the villages of Serampore, Akna and Perrapore. The new factory, called Frederiksnagore in honour of Frederik V, was ready for use in September 1755.

But a few months later the Nabob died, and was succeeded by his grandson Siraj-ud-daula, who decided to declare war on the British. The Black Hole of Calcutta was an opening shot. It was answered by Clive's expedition and the Battle of Plassey, after which Siraj-ud-daula was replaced by a British client, Mir Jafar. In these conditions Frederiksnagore, which had given refuge to the French fleeing from their enclave of Chandernagore and had suffered an English blockade as a result, found it difficult either to trade or to stay out of the hostilities. The factory was soon delapidated (it was complained that 'tigers, which are rife here, have an open way in to us') and the Danish Company could not compete with the privileged and imperialistic British, who even opened its mail. But individuals in the Company's service did well out of

private trade, though that was strictly forbidden by their employers. While Anglo-French hostilities lasted, merchants of those two nations found the Danish flag a great convenience.

One venture of the third Company was altogether new. This was the colonisation of the Nicobars, a group of nineteen tropical islands north-west of Sumátra. In October 1756 the Company's directors noted: 'On 1st January, 1756, without the least resistance from the natives, who seem peaceful and simple folk, the Nicobars were taken into possession in His Majesty's name, and called New Denmark'.

'New Denmark' was the island of Great Nicobar, and also the colony which Lieut. Tanck founded there; while the group as a whole was renamed the Frederiks Islands.

Long before the directors heard this good news, Tranquebar had learned that the colonists, about twenty of them with forty or fifty soldiers, were in terrible health and unable to work. In August the *Kjøbenhavn* took out 150 others to replace them. These found in New Denmark about ten Danes and ten Indians alive, every man sick. Communication with Tranquebar had ceased because the crew of the colonists' little ship were all dead.

The new settlers moved to another island, Nancowry, but the deaths continued. Until, that is, death put in charge an assistant, G. F. Lund, who seems to have been highly efficient. For six months things went well, and wood was even cut for shipbuilding, which had been the colony's purpose. Then a fresh superintendent arrived with the survivors of New Denmark, who quickly infected the Nancowry colony. The superintendent himself lived only eighteen days; long enough, however, to give the Nicobar Islanders extravagant ideas of the gifts they could expect from foreigners. When Lund took charge again, the disappointed natives first robbed and then attacked the colony. In despair, the colonists got into their little ship and left for Sumatra, where they split up to make their several ways home.

The ship carrying Lund and three other Danish colonists was wrecked near, of all places, New Denmark, where the four remain-

ing settlers had just been killed by the islanders. For fourteen months Lund and an Indian servant lived there on fruit and the natives' charity. At last they escaped on a foreign ship, and reached Tranquebar in March 1760.

A list of some of the things the colonists left behind them makes interesting reading, especially for a descendant of Western Australian colonists. They included writing bureaux, clothes chests, silver teapots and sugar-bowls, porcelain table ornaments, brass flat-irons, coffee mills, periwigs, braided velvet suits and feather-trimmed hats. Like the West Australians, they had meant to live well.

In spite of all, Lund and other Danes were eager to repeat the experiment. In 1768 another colony was founded, by the Moravian Brethren. Again it was located in Nancowry, but this time between two Nicobar villages, a site which they reasonably thought would be healthier than the last. After only nine years, traces of the former colony had all but vanished.

Meanwhile, the Company in Copenhagen was going through a quiet revolution as the time approached for the renewal of its forty year charter. Its Indian possessions had increased, but it was disappointed with the returns, much less impressive than those of the China run. It was decided therefore to open those possessions to private trade. As a result, the King in 1777 took over all the Company's territories, properties and fixtures, following the example of the French Crown after the disaster of Dupleix. From that point, Tranquebar had the power of a European state behind it.

The times favoured the royal enterprise, as England and France were again at war, and for a while Copenhagen was one of the few European cities where East Indian products could be bought. But the outbreak of peace in 1783 brought back the old problems. Denmark-Norway was too thinly populated and too exclusively agricultural to thrive on the Asian trade. It had little to offer Indian and Chinese merchants but Norwegian iron and hard cash. There was a predictable, and very great, improvement in



trade after Britain again went to war with France in 1793; but the price Denmark eventually paid for the profits of neutrality is too well known to need repeating. In India, Frederiksnagore and Tranquebar were occupied by the British in May 1801, though peacefully, and only until July and August 1802. In January and February 1808 the two colonies were taken over again; and this time the occupation looked like being permanent.

But before that great setback, there was a little one in the Nicobars. Austrians of the Trieste Company had established themselves there in 1778; and though they gave up in despair in 1783, Denmark was anxious to publicise its sovereignty. In 1784 the ship *Dansborg* arrested the remaining 'Austrians' – one Italian and one Indian – with their equipment, weapons and flag. In 1791 another colonization expedition set out from Tranquebar, to be routed as usual by fever. Some sort of garrison was maintained until 1808, and the Austrians never came back; but the Danes' death-rate was high, and their profit, as before, nil.

Denmark regained its Indian colonies in 1815, but the condition of the motherland, bankrupt in 1813 and shorn of Norway and its fleet, was precarious. With deep depression at home, it seemed unlikely that the colonies could survive for long.

Though, surprisingly, they had another thirty years of life, it was a painful time. Danish shipping, finding more profit in lading and unlading in foreign ports, deserted Tranquebar, so that the office of toll-collector became irrelevant. The town's native population fell, as the weavers felt the effects of Britain's industrial revolution. Many houses stood empty, and some of Dansborg's decrepit outbuildings and appurtenances were demolished.

Frederiksnagore, like Danmarks nagore before it, had suffered as an anchorage from a change in the sandbanks of the Hooghly River. There even more houses stood empty. It had become almost an English town, full of English debtors evading prison. A Dane in 1824 remarked that it was a town 'where everything is English, but where the King of Denmark is so kind as to pay the costs of administration and let justice be done'.

There was one new development, however. Colonel Ole Bie, Director of Frederiksnagore in the 'flourishing period', had been a religious man, in spite of having so many children of all colours hat the English called Frederiksnagore 'the Bie-hive'. He allowed English Baptists, most unwelcome elsewhere, to settle at Frederiksnagore and set up a printing-press, something forbidden in British India. So in its commercial decline Frederiksnagore became an important evangelical and educational centre, particularly interested in the study of Oriental languages, including Sanskrit and Chinese. With the encouragement of Frederik VI, a 'College for the Instruction of Asiatic and Other Youth in Eastern Literature and European Science' was dedicated in 1821, and in 1827 a royal diploma recognized 'The Serampore College' as, in effect, a university. The famous English bishop Heber, author of the hymn 'From Greenland's icy mountains,/From India's coral strand', which seems like an unconscious reference to the extent of Danish interests, reported in 1823 that 'Seranpore's administration . . . is extraordinarily good and does Colonel Kretting and the Danish officials much honour'.

But life was draining out of the Danish colonies, and in 1845 a measure often before suggested in hard times was decided upon. After a flirtation with Russia, Denmark sold her Indian colonies to Britain for 1½ million rixdollars or rupes. The handover took place on October 11 at Frederiksnagore and on November 7 at Tranquebar. Steen Bille, commander of the corvette *Galathea*, which represented the Danes reported: 'All, white or black, Hindus or Moslems, were unanimous in expressing sorrow that their dear flag was struck'.

From India the *Galathea* went on to the Nicobars in a last attempt to establish a viable colony there. A settlement had once again been founded on Nancowry in 1830, under a missionary called Rosen; but fever did its usual work, and Governor Christensen of Tranquebar, who made a visit in 1832 to Frederikshøj, as the place was called, died on his way home. Frederikshøj was abandoned in 1834.

In 1844 an English firm in Calcutta, J. Mackey & Co., suggested setting up a new colony in the islands, and sharing the costs equally with the Danish Crown. An expedition went out the following year, and reported having found coal; which was good news, as the plan was to establish a bunkering station for steamships. Commander Bille of the *Galathea* was given these tidings on his arrival in India, and what had been intended as a naturalists' expedition suddenly became a colonists' one. Many of the new colonists were expatriate Chinese. This time the settlement was laid out on the little island of Pulo Milu. Bille found it very pretty, and was boundlessly optimistic.

But Mackey & Co. went bankrupt, fever raged again, and a Danish warship had to take away the survivors in 1848. And England, while refusing to buy the islands, insisted on Denmark's responsibility for the behaviour of its inhabitants and visitants towards foreign shipping. So, by a royal resolution of 1868, it was declared that Denmark renounced its sovereignty, and that England or any other state could do what it liked with the islands and the pirates in them. With that, Denmark's 250-year adventure in the Indian Ocean came to an end.

In its small way, it had been important: not least to the inhabitants of Île de France, or Mauritius, where the Danish ship *Fleisberg* had cut ebony as early as 1622. This being so, it is unkind of the Mauritian historian Auguste Toussaint to call the Danes the 'poor whites' of the Indian Ocean. But less unkind than the possibly innocent question, long and bitterly remembered, of a Tranquebar Hindu: 'Are the Danes of a different caste from the other Europeans?' Their comparative poverty galled the Danes extremely. But given that poverty, the survival of their colonies for more than two centuries seems all the more creditable.

And everyone agrees that Frederiksnagore and Tranquebar were handsome little towns, as indeed they look in the water-colours of the gifted Peter Anker, Governor of Tranquebar in the 'flourishing period'. Tranquebar especially, with its high walls and imposing gates, verandahed houses, palms and church spires,

was generally admired. It must have been dull, it must have been stifling in the dry three-quarters of the year, when the baking wind was particularly trying; but all agree that it was 'smuk' (pretty).

I have not myself ever been to Tranquebar, or seen any photograph of it later than 1936, so it must be my memory of life on another sandy shore of the Indian Ocean that gives me such a strong feeling of having lived there. I seem to remember the hot houses, rife with mosquitoes and white-ants. Especially I seem to remember the sea beating on the walls of Dansborg, eating them away, sucking back the sand and undermining them. That sounds like the Indian Ocean I grew up with. But I shall leave it to Commander Bille of the *Galathea* to pronounce the last sad words on Danish Tranquebar.

The French circumnavigator Laplace says that he was made to think of the ruins of Pompeii when, on a bright moonlit night, he came ashore for the first time at Tranquebar and went into the town. Although I do not know these famous monuments of antiquity, I can well imagine that the observation is penetrating. Here in the regular streets one sees magnificent buildings with splendid porticoes, designed in the antique style; but the closed shutters and doors witness that they are uninhabited, and the rank-growing grass in the squares and in the streets shows plainly that only slight commerce animates the little town. (Bille, p. 65)

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# Randolph Stow

## alias

### Mikiel tal-Awstralija

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#### THREE MALTESE POEMS

##### *PLAYING WITH MY CORONET*

'Mike, Carmelo did not forget you and forget when you stay playing on my steps with your coronet and with the acorion of his mouth'.

Letter from a Maltese farmer's wife

'Your coronet', she would say, and meant by that recorder, then in vogue with English schoolgirls. Through dove-blue dusks, out on the razzett roof, my fingers limped to enchant the empty valley. For Pan, one felt, had not been always dead, and flutes perhaps were heard at Haġar Qim.

The harmonica in her man's enormous fists shone like a little fish. We played duets intolerably, with joy. And San Ġużepp (Saint Joe the Worker, bearded and be-jeaned) fetched oils and canvas out to set us down: 'Peasant and Poet, Clowning After Wine'.

I write for you, Vittur, though you won't hear and Carmelo hasn't ever known my language, thinking of lamplit meals, when Pastard came

with a sailor's yarn, or to wrestle Ġużepp Haddiem.  
And of Xidi, with his reliably daft non-news.  
And of MALTA TIBKI LILL-PAPA on your door.

Remembering wine-dark dreams in the midday shade  
under the weird green asps of the Ħarrub,  
and insomniac nights of white and distant silver  
when the valley seemed agape for the mercury sea.  
And the taste of capers fresh from crannied walls  
and smell of wiża, that scent that breaks my heart.

The Turks of time have scarred our ramparts now,  
but pasts endure. Let us, for us, endure,  
stubborn as Malta, stubborn as Mnajdra  
– stubborn, Maltin, as you.

razzett: small flat-roofed Maltese farmhouse

Ħaġar Qim and Mnajdra: megalithic temples in Malta

San Ġużepp Haddiem: St. Joseph the Worker, patron of labour

Malta tibki lill-Papa: 'Malta mourns the Pope' (John XXIII)

ħarrub: the carob tree

wiża: lemon-scented verberna (*erba Latta*)

Maltin: the Maltese people

## ALOF DE VIGNACOURT SITS FOR HIS PORTRAIT

Malta's Grand Master slightly looks aside,  
his pouched eyes shrewd, his mouth, made to command,  
not robbed of humour. With that dangerous gaze  
that eats him, he can cope. He knows such men.

They will not part, these two; the lord of knights  
glancing (could it be scornfully?) forever  
away from what one knows is at one's back:  
the perilous black stare of Caravaggio.

Not part, nor ever leave this island quite  
which brought them for one endless hour together.  
How well they chose; how well they march in step  
down centuries, each with his glint of steel.

I saw one evening in a knightly house  
the silver galley of de Vignacourt  
row down the table, motionlessly thrusting  
towards faces that were his, and sipped their wine.

As for the other, he haunts village bars.  
His voice breaks out; one scents that Maltese danger:  
the flashing knife, the blow, astonishment  
– and then the dark of Caravaggio's eye.



## SIMPLICITIES OF SUMMER

My peace is in this: that vineleaves should shower green glass  
on the amphitheatre of orchards whose stage is the sea  
and the breeze blow sharp, with thyme from the darkening bluff  
where all day you have tramped or lain, till this trace-light came.

My peace is in this: that each nightfall must bring you back,  
and the lamplight, under my eyes, die warm on your face,  
that your voice must be the last sound I hear before sleeping,  
and your breath, asleep, be what I hear if I wake.

My peace and my hope are in this: that giving should be  
in the gift of the proud and poor; that the swimmer's power  
and potencies of summer, through one stem,  
blend, as we ripen, apart on two boughs of noon.

Acknowledgements:

'Simplicities of Summer' appeared first of all in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and 'Alof de Vignacourt' in *The Age*.

## The Arrival at the Homestead A Mind-Film

After the jolt at the dry creek bed, and the turning of the red road through the straggling myall, part of the homestead came in sight. And the traveller knew it. Or perhaps did not quite know it, since it was any homestead at all in that part of the country, such as he could have drawn from memory or built like Meccano in his mind. Yet something made him slow down the car, something at last made him pull up and wait, in the soft red dust by the rotting gate through which he could see down the beaten earth to the house.

It was any homestead at all. Sheds of corrugated iron, railed yards, a windmill. Near one end of the house a thicket of bamboo masked what must have been a very large tank. But of the house itself he could see not much more than the roof, of faded red iron, and the window of some addition, perhaps the kitchen, which had been tacked on to the lefthand wall. The rest was screened by a verandah densely overgrown with bougainvillaea, flowering in that crude purple he had always loathed. He could see that the house was built of the local stone, and consisted of probably not more than four rooms, divided by a passage. That was not counting the kitchen, of course (it was certainly the kitchen), through the window of which he had the impression of being watched.

He loathed the bougainvillaea, he loathed the homestead. The patch was bordered by straggling vincas and by beer-bottles driven nose-first into the dirt. The fence had a hedge of saltbush. No lawn, no greenness, only bare red earth, and one scrubby oleander whose white flowers had shrivelled brown in the heat.

And the heat was stunning. His shirt stuck to the seat, and

separated from it with a sound like a kiss. He slipped a hand down his trousers and scratched his sodden crotch. The brush of his own sex reminded him.

The homestead was astonishingly still. The windmill was motionless, no dog had barked. He heard nothing, nothing at all, but the distant carping of crows.

Through the kitchen window he had the feeling of being watched. And inside, perhaps...

The dusty car stands by the gate, framed in the window. The man inside does nothing; he simply sits.

Impossible to see what sort of man he is.

On the table is a sheet of lined paper, a red pencil with a chewed end, and a fluted green bottle.

The man sits.

The man sighs, and opens the car door. He pushes the gate and walks up the path. Then he turns to his left and looks in at the kitchen window.

The room is cheerful, spotless. The woman sits writing at the table, pretending not to have seen him. He taps on the gleaming glass.

She looks up. Their eyes examine. With her thumb she indicates a door at the far side of the room.

The traveller comes in by the back door and goes to the woman. He lifts her hair from her neck, he raises her to her feet. Their lips suck, their bodies press together.

Where? asks his mouth.

She takes his hand and leads him, by another door, through a dim sitting-room. They cross a passage, they go into a dim bedroom. Very little light can penetrate the bougainvillaea. Fumbling, they undress one another. Then they fall. He kisses her mouth, her breasts. She sighs as she strokes him.

By the bed is a photograph of a hatless man in an Australian Army uniform of World War II.

To some question, the woman only smiles.

When he enters her it seems to last forever. She cries and moans. As the moment comes he groans, burying his face in the hollow of her neck.

Never, her mouth says. Oh never, never oh never.

His face is confident, man-proud. His desire amazes her. In the glistening heat they cry out like birds. Nothing like this has ever happened to him.

From the car he noticed that the kitchen window looked dusty, but still there was the sense of being watched. And the familiarity of the place irritated him. Was it simply that so many homesteads were alike, or had he indeed been there before?

On a plastic tablecloth, checked red and white, sheets of newspaper are spread out.

A woman's hands, freckled and time-spotted, reach into the light of the kerosene lamp.

By one hand lies a worn, non-stainless carving knife.

The hands fold and refold the newspapers. The carving knife slits them into squares.

The woman's hands gather the squares into a pile.

On the topmost square can be seen the upper face of a woman in her best hat of World War II.

Beside it is the headline: A BUSH TRAGEDY.

Definitely the window was dirty. And the arrival was watched, he knew it.

The woman in the lamplit kitchen has reshuffled her newspaper squares for neatness. Her left hand holds them, her right approaches with a bag-needle.

She spears the papers through one corner, threading them on binder-twine. Her hands make a knot.

On top of the pile, under some columns of crude print, there is now a photograph of the homestead.

The homestead was astonishingly still. The windmill was motionless, perhaps out of action. And yet there would be days when

hot wind would sweep through the kitchen, showering dust on the floor, and the refrigerator (he could see that) would be shrouded in a wet blanket to keep it from defrosting. Someone sitting alone in the kitchen, with nothing to do

Someone sitting alone in the kitchen, with nothing to do all day but listen to the crows. . .

The sweat of his crotch felt like slime. And inside, perhaps. . .

The man sighs, and opens the car door. He pushes the gate and walks up the path. Then he turns to his left and looks in at the kitchen window.

Through the dust and cobwebs nothing can be seen.

He comes in at the back door, which is unlocked, and sees the room carpeted with dust. On the stove the "fountain" is rusty, its brass tap green. On the table is a red pencil with a chewed end and a sheet of ruled paper on which something has been written, something now made illegible by dust and mouse-piss.

He goes to the other door, enters the dim sitting-room. There is light enough to see that mice have been tearing up the armchairs.

He crosses the passage, goes into the dim bedroom. A dusty counterpane on the bed covers a humped shape. On a table nearby, beside a photograph, is a bottle of fluted green glass.

Very slowly he stoops and draws back the counterpane, which tears.

She has died screaming. Every tooth is visible, some with amalgam fillings.

The empty eye-sockets regard him out of the mummified face. Her hair, of indeterminate colour, is spread out on the mouldering pillow.

He replaces the counterpane, which tears again.

Suddenly, the man in the car had it. "Of course", he said aloud.

In a dim earth closet, smelling of phenyle and excrement, a bundle of newspaper-squares hangs from a nail by the door.

A boy's hand reaches out and tears one off.

The headlines of the yellowed paper read:

SEQUEL TO  
A TRAGEDY  
A Letter  
Two Years  
Late

The boy's hand opens the privy door for more light. The paper rests on his bare knees. His shorts and underpants are around his ankles.

His hand tears off a second square, and fits it to the other. The newspaper, so reconstructed, shows beside the headlines a man in an Australian Army uniform, and a woman in her best hat of World War II.

Both of these studio portraits have been retouched to the point of inhumanity.

The boy's hand tears off another square. Below the columns of print is a photograph of the homestead.

A khaki pick-up truck, Army surplus, drives up to the gate.

The kitchen is squalid. A bachelor has been living here.

A stumbling tread comes nearer down the path. The back door opens, and the legs of a man unsteadily cross the room.

The man's bare right forearm plants bottles of liquor amidst the debris on the table. Some empty, ill-smelling tins are knocked to the floor. The man's body sways. His right hand supports him on the back of a kitchen chair. With his left he takes a handful of money from his pocket as if to count it.

The chair falls. The man, laughing, shouts: 'Whoops!', and sprawls, in a rattle and roll of coins.

On the floor, still laughing, the man says: 'Fuck.'

His arm gropes beneath the pinewood dresser. It fetches out cobwebs, dead insects, a few shillings. And at last, a dirty sheet of

lined paper.

The back of the sheet is against the man's drawn-up knees. He reads it, sitting on the floor. His head is out of sight behind the dresser.

In the dim interior of the next room the man's forearm opens a drawer. He reaches into it.

On the floor by the back door dust stirs as the man's legs approach. The door whines opens, and the man is gone.

A shot; and the crows cry out in astonishment.

The window was unmistakably dirty.

'Abandoned,' said the man in the car aloud.

He turned the key in the ignition. Red dust billowed around as he drove off.

The car drives off, out of the square of the window.

The man inside did nothing; he simply sat.

The car drives off. The paper flutters to the floor.

Impossible to see what sort of man he was.

The letter drifts, and lodges under the dresser. The car drives off.

On the table forever, on the table forever and forever are:

a sheet of lined paper

a red pencil with a chewed end

and a fluted green bottle.

On the paper so far are only five words: TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

## Randolph Stow in Scandinavia

The State and University Library of Aarhus recently received a request for Scandinavian research material on the Western Australian poet and novelist Randolph Stow. Although the result was rather meagre, I believe it to be of interest to readers of *Kunapipi*

### WORKS BY RANDOLPH STOW (English editions)

#### *Novels*

*A Haunted Land*. 1956

*The Bystander*. 1957

*To the Islands*. 1958

*Tourmaline*. 1963

*The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*. 1965

#### *Juvenile Fiction*

*Midnite*. 1967

#### *Poetry*

*Act One*. 1957

*Outrider*. Poems 1956-62. 1962

*Australian Poetry*. 1964. Selected by Randolph Stow. 1964

*A Counterfeit Silence*. Selected Poems. 1969 <sup>6</sup>

*Poetry from Australia*. Pergamon Poets 6, with Judith Wright and William Hart-Smith, ed. by Howard Sergeant, 1969

*Poets on Record: Randolph Stow* University of Queensland, 1974.  
Published Boosey and Hawkes. Recorded Unicorn.



*Writings for Music Theatre* (with composer Peter Maxwell Davies)  
*Eight Songs for a Mad King*. 1969  
*Miss Donnethorne's Maggot*. 1974.

Most of Stow's books are held by Danish academic libraries and may be borrowed through the Scandinavian inter-loan scheme. However, none of the books have been translated into any other Scandinavian languages than Danish.

## WORKS BY RANDOLPH STOW TRANSLATED INTO DANISH

*Til du hader mig*. Cph. Wangel. 1960. (Translated by H. Juul Madsen from *A Haunted Land*).

*Udenfor*. Cph. Wangel. 1961. (Translated by H. Juul Madsen from *The Bystander*).

*Kaptajn Midnite og hans bande*. Cph. Gyldendal. 1971. (Translated by Birte Swensson from *Midnite*).

Several poems have been translated into Swedish by Gun Ursing. 'Landskap' ('Landscapes') and 'Vildlandsboet' ('Wild Duck's Nest') in: *Lyriska ännas* 3, 1977, pp. 49-51

'Sommarens enkelheter' ('Simplicities of Summer') translated by Gun Ursing was recited as 'Dagens Dikt' ('Poem of the day') in Swedish Radio on May 18, 1978.

A selection of poems in Swedish translation is expected to be published in early 1979.

## REVIEWS AND CRITICAL STUDIES

### REVIEWS

*Til du hader mig*.

BRIX, Hans: 'Et hus går under' ('Fall of a House'), *Bertingske Aftenavis*, March 19, 1960.

CLAUSEN, Viggo: 'Australisk fordærv' ('Australian Depravity') *Information*, June 11, 1960.

KISTRUP, Jens: 'Australisk familieliv' ('Family Life in Australia'), *Bertingske Tidende*, April 7, 1960.

*Udenfor.*

BARFOED, Niels: 'Blond intervention' ('Intervention of a Blonde'), *Information*, June 15, 1961.

BRANDSTRUP, Ole: 'Fra ensomhedens overdrev' ('From the Outskirts of Loneliness'), *Bertingske Aftenavis*, May 16, 1961.

KISTRUP, Jens: 'Vildfaren kærlighed' ('Lost Love') *Bertingske Tidende*, April 29, 1961

RIFBJERG, Klaus: 'Fra den gamle, nye verden' ('From the Old, New World, *Politiken*, July 2, 1961.

## CRITICAL STUDIES

BJÖRKSTÉN, Ingmar: Australiensisk litteraturoversikt och efter Patrick White? ('Survey of Australian literature! After Patrick White?') *BLM, Bonniers litterära magasin*, 4, 1975, pp. 214-219.

BOELSMAND, Andreas: Major Themes in Randolph Stow. (Unpublished M.A. Thesis) Aarhus University, English Department, 1973

HOVMAND-OLSEN, Bent: The Law/Narrator Duality in Randolph Stow's *Tourmaline*. *Commonwealth Newsletter*, No. 5, December 1973, pp. 8-16.

LUNDKVIST, Arthur: Läsfrukter. Stockh. 1973. (Randolph Stow pp. 166-168).

RUTHERFORD, Anna and BOELSMAND, Andreas: Interview with Randolph Stow. *Commonwealth Newsletter*, No. 5, December 1973, pp. 17-20.

Björkstén has written an article on Stow with some poems. It is expected that the article will be published towards the end of the

year in *Artes*, Kvartalsskrift för konst, litteratur och musik.

Randolph Stow was guest lecturer at Aarhus University in the Spring semester of 1973.

MARK O'CONNOR

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## Boeotian and Loyolan Art

*Ethnic Radio* by Les A. Murray (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1978).

Price Aust.\$4.95 from A & R, P. O. Box 177, Cremorne Junction, NSW 2090, Australia.

In sorting through the mass of English-language poetry poured out by the printing-presses of the world, one's problem is not so much to tell good from bad as to distinguish, out of the great press of the merely talented, that tiny handful of poets (probably not more than half a dozen in a generation) who have something major and distinctive to say. Among observers of Australian poetry suspicion has been hardening over the last five years that Les A. Murray may be such a one.

Thirty-nine-year-old Murray is a man of paradoxes: an innovator in style, but a social conservative; supporter of the deposed Whitlam government, and critic of its ideology; a republican polemicist who refers to the British Crown as 'that scab of our dependence', yet advocates a republic less for what it might

change in Australian society than for what it might conserve; a convert to an eclectic, yet essentially preecumenical Catholicism; populist democrat, who treasures (SR1 spelling is used throughout) an aristocratic Scots Gaelic ancestry; poet who celebrates the countryside, yet like one in five Australians lives in Sydney; and finally, a linguist who speaks most of the languages of Europe, yet prefers the complexities of Australian vernacular culture.

One clue to the paradoxes of Murray lies in his loyalty to the New South Wales countryfolk among whom he grew up. Describing his adolescent rebellion against the university system, he states that the one thing he understood was that fully to accept the fashionable ideas of the late fifties would have been to betray his friends and family. ('Thus education doth make class-traitors of us all'.) There is a great deal in this, especially in an overwhelmingly urbanized country, where a first-class honors degree has become the new passport to political power, and where the more progressive and intellectual of the two political parties proved when in power to have no rural policy whatever. Where an earlier generation of Australian intellectuals during the 20-year-long mild McCarthyist period that followed the defeat of the Japanese invasion joined the shrill consensus of the tertiary-educated, cursed their philistine countrymen and tended to go into voluntary exile abroad, Murray has in turn cursed that consensus, and become the most extreme example of a new generation of Australian intellectuals who are unashamedly proud of their homeland.

In *Ethnic Radio* Murray excels at sympathetic depiction of his countrymen in precisely those attitudes that would tempt a Barry Humphries to satire. No one captures so well that world of meaning in the pause before an Australian farmer replies 'Yes, that'd be right'; or even the metaphysics of a card-player's anecdote about a bookmaker who failed to adjust his odds during a plunge on an outsider:

*So drunk he kept it at ten - and the bloody thing lost!*  
*He bought a fern out of it. Round the battered formica*

table the talk is luck more than justice, justice  
being the politics of a small child's outcry.

The subtlest eyes in the Southern Hemisphere look at  
the cards in front of them. *Well I'll go alone.*  
Outside the window, passionfruit flowers are blooming  
singly together. Many are not in the sun.

Murray's short sentences capture well the flat ironic cadences of Australian speech. The mild metaphysics of the succeeding stanzas build well to the superbly vernacular conclusion: 'The game's loosely sacred; luck is being worked at'.

With landscape, too, he rejects European preconceptions, seeing things familiarly and whole. Here, for instance, he describes an excursion on the bark-steeped peaty waters of the Myall Lakes in central New South Wales:

As we were rowing to the lakes  
our oars were blunt and steady wings

the tanbark-coloured water was  
a gruel of pollen: more coming down  
hinted strange futures to our cells

the far hills ancient under it  
the corn flats black-green under heat  
were cut in an antique grainy gold

it was the light of Boeotian art

*Boeotian* is a key term in Murray's aesthetics. It refers to that richly diversified regional tradition of Greek lyric poetry which the centralist Athenians affected to despise as rustic and dialectal. Boeotian poetry, as in Hesiod, has its centre wherever the mind and eye of the observer are:

still hearing, we saw a snake ahead  
winding, being his own schnorkel



In fact, by his development of a flexible poetry of statement that deals with real and important things Murray has done more than anyone else of his generation to strengthen the core tradition of Australian poetry and make a second Ern Malley hoax unnecessary. Here, for example, he describes his wife's experience as a refugee child shipped out to Australia after the 2nd World War:

Ahead of them lay  
the Deep End of the schoolyard,  
tribal testing, tribal soft-drinks,  
and learning English fast,  
the Wang-Wang language.

Ahead of them, refinements:  
thumbs hooked down hard under belts  
to repress gesticulation;

ahead of them, epithets:  
wog, reffo, Commo Nazi,  
things which can be forgotten  
but must first be told.

\* \* \*

Murray's merit is so evident that it is worth spending some time on the two defects that may yet pull him back into the ranks of the merely talented. The first, which he himself would probably admit, is his failure to date to develop a truly populist style of verse. The polysyllabification of the English language over the last 100 years has made its old metres, notably the iambic rhythm, clumsy and artificial. In the absence of a new metre, Murray, like most of us, is forced back upon free verse. But (as a glance at the funerals column in the daily paper would suggest) the one thing for which the ordinary person has never forgiven twentieth-century poets is their abandonment of metre. Poetry at its most minimal definition is memorable speech; but the absence of metre means that what one commonly remembers from Murray's work is the general

tenor plus a few salient phrases. It must gall him that A. D. Hope (whom he decries as an 'Athenian' poet) has probably more chance of being remembered and quoted by the average reader, precisely because Hope has found a solution to the twentieth-century problem of metre.

Murray, however, counters with a remarkable ability to introduce into his verse the sort of choice vernacular phrase that one is more used to associating with David Williamson's characters. Sometimes a poem is little more than an anecdote written down: for instance in the piece where he describes how bravado led him to attempt a vindaloo curry – 'Fair play! It was frightful. I spooned the chicken of hell / in a sauce of rich yellow brimstone'; or in his reference to his surplus fat – 'flat food round the midriff, long food up your sleeves'.

But it's a narrow tight-rope. One of the immediate consequences of loss of metre, perhaps first seen in Pound's doctoring of *The Wasteland*, is elitism. Deprived of the traditional metrical craft that connected his skills with the demands of the less literary reader, the poet resorts to clevernesses, to allusiveness, and to elliptical compression. Murray, in his poem on the carnage at Gallipoli, rightly rebukes Eliot for having led this fashion, but even in his reference falls into the same vice:

The misemployed, undone by courage  
have become the Unsaluting Army  
and buttoned boys, for all their trades  
are country again, and that funny Missus  
Porter's not yet changed poetry.

As Murray admits, it's a losing business at present: no matter how hard you try to reach the public you wind up as the property of an elite.

His most interesting solution to date has been to adopt the metres of aboriginal ceremonial poetry. In 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' the ritual Christmas– holiday summertime return to the countryside is represented as a sort of 'white-fellow



walkabout'; and the winding seasonal procession of cars up the Pacific highway north of Sydney is associated with the powerful *Rainbow Serpent* of aboriginal mythology:

It is the season of the Long Narrow City; it has crossed the Myall, it has entered the North Coast,  
that big stunning snake; it is looped through the hills, burning all night there.

Hitching and flying on the downgrades, processionalally balancing on the climbs,

it echoes in O'Sullivan's Gap, in the tight coats of the flooded-gum trees; the tops of the palms exclaim at it unmoved, there near Wootton.

Glowing all night behind the hills, with a north-shifting glare, burning behind the hills;

through Coolongolook, through Wang Wauk, across the Wallamba, the booming charred pipe of the holiday slows and spurts again.

The long lines permit a certain necessary prolixity that suits well with Murray's eye for cumulative detail: 'toddlers, running away purposefully at random, among cars, into big-drownie water (come back, Cheryl-Ann!)'. At times, too, they enable him, without losing precision, to achieve a kind of Homeric high style, as when the flying-fox fruit bat, launching down from his perch, 'becomes the unfolded, far-speeding, upward-sidestepping, night-owl- outflying one'. It remains to be seen whether these aboriginal rhythms can be permanently adapted to Australian speech-patterns, or whether they will degenerate into modishness.

\* \* \*

But Murray's is so much a poetry of statement that his real Achilles heel may lie in the pattern of ideas which he so relentlessly asserts.

As poet of ideas Murray reveals himself as essentially an eclectic conservative intellectual with populist leanings. He is capable of importing into his verse even the most standard tricks of conservative rhetoric – for instance the assumption of an implausibly

cyclical view of social history, so that changes in the climate of ideas are dismissed as matters of fashion:

We are mad for fresh starts, for leaps forward,  
for this vertigo;  
for new Angles and recycled Breakthroughs,  
the 1912 show

or

Uptown, the Bomb Culture's just opened  
its European run,  
discounting many things on his counter:  
calm tradition is one.

But this position is not so staid as might seem. White Australian society, since the pioneering days, has been committed to a process of incessant change. Even its out- and-out reactionaries of the Bjelke-Petersen mould are characterized precisely by their unquestioning belief in 'development'. The national psyche is like that of Murray's 'New World Driver': its notion of conservatism is to continue cruising at 60 mph and hope the terrain won't change too much in the process. In such a society (as even so moderate a group as the conservationists have discovered) nothing requires so radical a restructuring of inherited prejudices as the desire to keep things unchanged. Hence fearless conservatism can land a man like Murray in what seems to be the extreme radical camp. His well-known republicanism and vernacularism are good examples of this effect.

But of course the weakness of most conservative intellectuals is that at some point they are conservative not only in their goals, but in their thinking. 'Give me a child's mind till he is 7', sed St Ignatius Loyola, 'and I will determine his ideas for the rest of his life'. Much of what passes for conservative philosophizing is simply the fabrication of logical links between one Loyolan position (that is, one emotionally indoctrinated belief) and another; much

like a child completing one of those puzzles where if you join all points in the right order you create a picture. Murray is doubtless right, or at least within the permissible degree of error, in his pro-vernacular, pro-rural, anti-'Athenian' and neo-anti-colonial emphases; but there are too many places where grosser prejudice shows through. What is one to make of a poem ('Impulse resisted on the Manly Ferry') which carries in its slight length such refrains as: 'Lovemaking may still, at times, make love', "'Man" is a prouder name than "male"', and 'A fuck is never just a fuck'?

In an earlier book Murray asserted that an unwanted pregnancy should be accepted as a divine summons to experience. In *Ethnic Radio* the interesting piece 'Lachlan Macquarie's First Language' ends with the governor's Gaelic seer prophesying an Australia where 'All folk there,/ except the child-hating ones were ladies and gentlemen'. Only the reader thoroughly familiar with Murray's ideas might guess that this translates roughly as 'All Australians will achieve middle-class culture, except the fashionable intellectuals who promote abortion and birth-control'. The obscurity may be meant to give a kind of aesthetic softening to Murray's views; in fact it makes them more strident.

Such passages raise the fear that Murray is engaged in a precarious balancing act, one that involves him in trying to import into the humanist mainstream of Australian debate assumptions which really derive from his religious doctrines. (Abortion is a good example: you cannot convincingly argue in *human terms* that destroying a foetus is the same thing as murdering an adult. That sort of argument is always theology in disguise.)

And even on purely secular issues Murray's thinking is often constricted by Loyolan effects. It is not that one objects to his rural bias, his sympathy for those so often unfairly dismissed as rustics, yokels, illiterates simply because their votes keep a conservative government in power. And as an Australian Murray is certainly right to reject stone-age Marxism as a solution, and insist that people be respected in terms of their own culture. But there remains too much suspicion that he, a super-intelligent in-

tellectual, sometimes uses the inadequacies of ordinary minds as a cover for his own timidities. The four futuristic pieces in this collection reveal a certain fear, even on those issues he knows best, of venturing across psychic open space.

For instance, as a linguistic scholar Murray should be well aware that any alphabetically-written language which reduces itself to a standardized written form must be prepared to update that standardized form every couple of centuries, as most European languages have in fact done in the last 100 years, or else suffer massive and increasing illiteracy such as now afflicts all the English-speaking nations. (Britain alone has some 2 million *adult* illiterates, whose humiliations it is difficult for a literate person to imagine; the plight of Australian schoolchildren is notorious.) Yet in his unpronounceable poem 'The Cwdeitar' both humane and philologic considerations are swept aside; and we find Murray proposing, with all the tart elitism of a village schoolmistress, that the updating of spelling be seen as a totalitarian plot to sabotage international culture!

Murray's satire on universities ('Fantasy of the World as a Softened University'), a theme to which he returns in this volume, shows a similar flaw:

I am a cleaner in the Faculty of Production,  
South Sydney Campus. We are Subtechnics staff;  
next year we'll be allowed to wear blue denim  
and take our orders only from postgraduates.  
At night, our seminar scrubs the Assembly Building  
where the undergraduates assemble cars. Untidy,  
scruffy young people, but you have to pity them,  
not being allowed to pair-bond till they graduate.

The futuristic presuppositions of the satire are ingeniously deployed. Nevertheless, it fails inasmuch as the reader is left with some suspicion that Murray resents universities not merely for their real vices (bureaucracy, elitism, masonic intent) but also because they do, with all their faults, serve as centres where the

intelligent young can find both the equipment and the confidence to question society's norms. (The suggestion that their present tenuous right not to 'pair-bond' must turn into a compulsion seems to be a typical conservative misapprehension.)

Projecting the future is not of course an activity at which the conservative temperament-exceeds. Its strength is rather in a certain doggedly contented realism about the way things are. But even here there are some sad opportunities missed, both aesthetically and philosophically. For instance 'Laconics', Murray's account of how his family bought and cleared forty acres of 'prime brush land' (rainforest), is in places not so much laconic as tongue-tied. Here is the conclusion:

That interior machinegun,  
my chainsaw, drops dead timber

where we burn the heaps  
we'll plant kikuyu grass.

Ecology? Sure.  
But also husbandry.

And the orchard will go there  
and we'll re-roof the bare pole barn.

Ourcroft, our Downs,  
our sober, shining land.

The blend of creative and machismo-ish satisfactions in clearing forest-land is nicely etched; and the dismissive reference to the claims of 'ecology' neatly captures the countryman's irritation with the preachings of the city-bred weekend-tripping conservationist. Nevertheless, there are too many deep issues being skimmed. Why should more land be cleared on the world's least poorly forested continent? And what can be said in defence of a system of ownership that gives a million-year-old ecological community into the hands of a human individual and invites him to

destroy it for his own satisfaction, or to rationalize an investment? Follow these kinds of uneasiness through, and you eventually undermine the basic propositions on which Australian society has been built. (To do this you have to avoid the twin heresies of Marxism and conservative Christianity, each of which sees the planet Earth as the property of a single species with unlimited breeding rights.) However the sad thing in the present instance is not so much that Murray's ideas are shared by many of his countrymen, as that his commitment to pro-rural polemic has prevented his admitting the ideas and emotions that might have given him a richer and deeper poem.

\* \* \*

It may seem I have spent too much space on Murray's philosophy. But his is so much a poetry of statement that its merit depends greatly on the adequacy of the ideas expressed. And there is a very real risk that Murray's attachment to certain Loyolan convictions which society is already abandoning, will sabotage his poetry. It is this that may eventually cause posterity to glance at much of his work and sigh for the waste of talent.

If so, Murray will be remembered not for his doctrines but for his more disinterested observations: for his picture of the world of refugee translators in 'Employment for the castes in Abeyance' -

I was Western Europe. Beiträge, reviste,  
dissertations, rapports, turned English under my  
one-fingered touch. Teacup-and-Remington days.

Prince Obolensky succeeded me for a time  
but he soon returned to Fiji to teach Hebrew.  
In the midst of life we are in employment

- rather than for his prematurely confident assertion that

machine translation never happened:  
language defeated it. We are a language species.

But his most undeniable achievement has been the development of a matter-of-fact free-verse poetry of statement: a poetry which gives us things like his Boeotian assertion of the unreality of the future

There is nothing about it. Much science fiction is set there  
but is not about it. Prophecy is not about it. . . .  
We see, by convention, a small living distance into it  
but even that's a projection. And all our projections  
fail to curve where it curves.

It is the black hole  
out of which no radiation escapes to us.

*That* gets not only the applause for ingenuity but the nod of agreement. What it sees is certainly true.

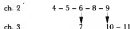
\* \* \*

If you haven't any of Murray's books, don't buy this one. Get his *Selected Works* (Angus & Robertson paperback, 1976). If you do have the *Selected Works* this is a worthy sequel.

## Loss and Frustration: an Analysis of A. K. Armah's *Fragments*

On a first reading *Fragments* may appear confusing because of the broken time sequence, but looked at more closely this feature gives the clue to the significance of the main metaphor of the book and thus to its meaning.

The time pattern falls into two distinctive groups; a circular and a linear one. The first group comprises the first and last chapters of the book, the end meets the beginning and forms a circle; the second group consists of the remaining ten chapters, arranged in a broken sequence. Chapters two and three which introduce us to the two main characters occur at approximately the same time, but in two different places, chapter six generates a memory which is contained in chapter seven, and chapter nine prompts two flash-backs which take up chapters ten and eleven. The time sequence could be summarized in the following simple diagram.



The action of this main section of the book takes just over one year. As friends and neighbours are escorting Baako to the mental hospital one of them says, 'a been-to, returned only a year ago'.<sup>1</sup> It seems fitting that just as the year has come full circle Baako has reached the logical end of his development. This mechanical ar-



range of chapters into two time sequences coincides with the two major – and opposing – world views in the book, which could be described as the traditional African and the modern Western outlook respectively. The form of the book can therefore be said to not only reflect, but be an integral part of its message or meaning. I shall deal with these two movements separately, starting with the circular aspect and then continue to discuss areas of overlap between the two and what possible conclusions can be drawn.

The circular movement is represented solely by Baako's grandmother, the old blind woman Naana. She is firmly rooted in traditional African thinking which is essentially a religious mode of perception, rejecting rational, scientific explanation of phenomena in favour of a transcendental, mythical system which defies logics and operates through ritual.

The circular movement of this part of the book is not just in space (the shape of the book) but in time as well which is of much greater significance. A circular concept of time is possible when death is not considered final, and thereby ending a sequence in time, but is looked at rather like a change in the mode of being in which the essence of the deceased continues in some form or other. Naana's main concern in life is to keep her circles unbroken; her most important circles are those of life and death and initiation, and her means of keeping them unbroken are sacrifice and prayer.

The life and death cycle is discussed in terms of Naana's own imminent death and the birth and outdooring of Araba's son. When Naana dies she will become an ancestral spirit. These spirits are as real to the clan or family as its living members. They are supposed to be imbued with more wisdom and power than mortals, and sacrifices are made to them to ensure their guidance and protection. Parrinder says about the ancestors and their relationship with the living:

The ancestors... have life and power in themselves, they are dead persons who have survived as real and immortal beings. The profound conviction of the vitality and continuity of the dead as a 'great cloud of witnesses' cannot be explained as... a simple experience of the survivors.<sup>2</sup>

Death is thus an elevation into a higher state of being, but one which has close connections with this life and which in many ways resembles it. Naana shows her expectancy of the familiarity of the spirit world when she says:

My spirit is straining for another beginning in a place where there will be new eyes and where the farewells that will remain unsaid here will turn to a glad welcome and my ghost will find the beginning that will be known here as my end. (p. 280)

This certainty of the nature of her new mode of life excludes all fear and explains the absence of fear of death in many African communities. The remark 'And what is an old woman but the pregnancy that will make another ghost?' (p. 10) shows her confidence in the cyclical movement of her existence, and she is already anticipating her role as a guarding spirit on a higher level in the African chain of being: 'When I go I will protect him if I can, and if my strength is not enough I will seek out stronger spirits and speak to their souls of his need of them' (p. 283). Just as Naana must die in order to be reborn a spirit, so babies must die in the spirit world in order to be born as human beings. This explains the meaning of the outdoor ceremony:

You know the child is only a traveller between the world of spirit and this world of heavy flesh. His birth can be a good beginning, and he may find his body and this world around it a home where he wants to stay. But for this he must be protected. Or he will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors prepared for him up here. (p. 139)

The first eight days of the baby's life are considered an interim period in which spirits and human forces are fighting to keep the baby among their number. 'There is often fear of supernatural trouble in the early days of a baby's life when it is still a visitor from the spirit world'.<sup>3</sup> Another Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor gives a dramatic description of the ancestors battling for the new born baby:

Seventh night at deep night when man's mouth has closed the law when they say the terrible god Sakpans will walk, sometimes covered with sores followed by barking dogs, sometimes the rich owner of land in velvet and a king's sandals shining on his feet dropping benevolence where he goes. The seventh night, deep deep night of the black black land of gods and deities they will come out . . . If they insist then I shall die the death of blood I shall die the death of blood.<sup>1</sup>

Another important ceremony in Naana's life is the one connected with initiation. Initiation in this context is closely connected with the journey metaphor and Jung's ideas of the archetype of the new birth. Initiation is described in terms of a departure, a death often in the shape of a visit to the land of the gods (Tutuola's Dead's town or Bunyan's Celestial City) and a return with a 'divine boon', a new insight which the quest hero can use to solve his own or his community's problems. The journey always includes a symbolic death of the old personality of the hero so that his new self can be born. On a psychological level it becomes the Jungian individuation process, on a mythical level it is the initiation rituals which occur at the onset of adolescence in most traditional African societies, and in philosophical terms Mircea Eliade has called it 'an ontological mutation of the existential condition.'<sup>2</sup>

Naana sees Baako's journey to the white man's land in terms of a quest journey and an initiation. Using the analogy of the life/death cycle she says, 'All that goes returns. He will return' (p. 1). The analogy is very apt; initiatory death is often symbolized by the initiate being swallowed by a monster and remaining in its belly until he is reborn like Jonah in the whale's belly. On seeing Baako walking into the aeroplane Naana says, 'We saw the line of people . . . go like gentle ghosts into the airplane. When it swallowed Baako in his turn, I could look no more' (p. 16). She visualizes him in the land of the dead (in Africa ghosts are white) 'roaming to unknown forbidden places, just born there again after a departure and a death somewhere' (p. 15). Just as she knows that he will return she also knows that he will be different, reborn

into a new state of awareness.

Straining across an immense culture gap Baako's vision of his studies abroad coincide with Naana's, even though he does not share her religious beliefs. He wants to use the knowledge he has gained abroad to widen the consciousness of his fellow Ghanaian, and it is when this hope is thwarted that his disillusionment sets in, resulting in another and more final death, symbolised by his madness.

Naana keeps her circles unbroken by means of 'the words and actions they have left us to guide us on the circular way' (p. 5). The words arrange themselves into prayers, and here Naana's insistence on keeping strictly to the formula is interesting. In his book *Muntu Jahnheiz Jahn* maintains that words were imbued with power of their own, irrespective of who said them. The prayer which Baako's drunken uncle said at his departure were 'perfect words, even coming from a man himself so blemished' (p. 9). Words could create a reality simply by being spoken, a concept which is also present in the Old Testament in the words 'In the beginning was the word'. From this belief springs the use of magical formulae which are strings of words that have a certain desired effect when spoken, and this is essentially how Naana views her prayers. She remembers how perfect the words said at Baako's departure were, and this reassures her that he will return.

The action that guides Naana are sacrifices, in this case liberation: 'The schnapps she pours on the ground at Baako's departure is a sacrifice of propitiation, which tries to remove sin, obvert danger or obtain a blessing'.<sup>6</sup> Again, the ritual itself is important as a reality, not a symbol, and when Foli does not pour enough drink she rectifies this by pouring an extra drink herself.

Naana represents true spirituality, the seeing blind eye as opposed to the blind seeing eyes that surround her. The unity which is essential to her vision is, however, slowly being destroyed, a fact that she laments. 'The larger meaning which lent sense to every small thing and every momentary happening years and years ago has shattered into a thousand useless pieces' (p. 280). Armah is

concerned with retrieving lost African values which could bring back to modern Ghana some of the spirituality it lacks. This is a concern he shares with many African writers, the Sierra Leonian poet Lenrie Peters being one of them:

#### HOME COMING

Our sapless roots have led  
The windswept seedlings of another age  
Cultivated weeds have grown where we led  
The virgins to the water's edge.

There at the edge of town  
Just by the burial ground  
Stands the house without shadow  
Lived in by new skeletons

That is all that is left  
To greet us on the home coming. . .<sup>2</sup>

The circular aspect of the book has been explored through time and space (arrangement of chapters), but Armah adds yet another media, that of visual impact. This is achieved through the somewhat contrived description of Baako's television scripts as he is burning them. A TV script is itself of mixed media in so far as it is ostensibly a piece of descriptive writing, which is, however, meant to be translated into visual images. Baako's script gives a concrete image of the twofold pattern into which the book falls, and so helps to fix this in the reader's mind. The circular movement in the TV script represents 'recipients of violence, vague fluid forms filling screen, circular yielding, soft, all black' (p. 20). The setting is a 'coastal village, quiet, circular and dark' (p. 20). This ties together many strands of Armah's vision of Africa. It is exploited, oppressed and peaceful, unable or unwilling to fight back. In his next book *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah deals extensively with this theme, postulating a Garden of Eden existence in black Africa before the coming of the white man.<sup>3</sup>

To return to the TV script. Superimposed upon the circular pattern are 'long, severely linear, sharp-edged pillars, shafts, all white like rows of soldiers at attention' (p. 207). These images represent 'the agents of violence', and they translate easily into their emotional equivalents, representing an aggressive, insensitive hard and cold culture, in other words, Europe.

This severely linear pattern is elaborated upon in the second movement of the book, that which deals with the modern Western outlook. Even though the aggressors in Baako's script are white the main target of his, and Armah's criticism, is the black bourgeoisie, a fact which rubs salt into an already very painful wound.

In general the criticism is directed at the various aspects of corruption and nepotism which are so much a part of life in West Africa. Baako has difficulties in getting a job, due to his reluctance to 'dash' the 'junior assistant to the secretary of the Civil Service Commission' (p. 110), even though he is given a clear indication of what the clerk wants when he says, 'come and see me . . . you want me to help you'. 'If you help me, I'll help you' is the current euphemism one uses when offering a bribe, but Baako ignores even this clear hint. The incident where the hospital refuses to admit Araba even though her condition is critical because she is not the wife of a V.I.P. is significant because it reveals the vehemence of Armah's revulsion. The uncompromising nature of Armah's vision has earned him critics and enemies among the established literary elite in West Africa, including Chinua Achebe who writes that 'Armah is clearly an alienated writer' and that 'there is enormous distance between Armah and Ghana'.<sup>9</sup>

Against the background of the general decay Armah focuses on one aspect which he treats in depth, that of the role played by the 'been to'. This creates an alternative vision of Baako's homecoming and highlights the difference between the two views. A 'been to' is a person who has been to England or America, usually to study, and he is expected to come back, laden with all the wonders of Western technology: radios, stereo equipment, refrigerators,

deep-freezes and cars. Brempong is the perfect 'been to'. 'Every time I go out I arrange to buy all I need suits and so on. It's quite simple. I got two good cars on this trip' (p. 65). He states categorically that 'it is no use going back with nothing' (p. 76), and his family gives him an ecstatic welcome in anticipation of the presents he is going to hand out. Armah chooses to discuss this phenomenon in terms of the Cargo Cult.

Cargo Cult was a social-religious movement in New Guinea between 1870 and 1950. It was the result of colonial interference with a traditional system which resembled West Africa in economic and social structure as well as religion:

The function of religion was to explain, through myths, how the deities and, in one recorded case, totems (but never the spirits of the dead) originally brought the cosmic order into being, and to give man the assurance that, through ritual, he was master of it.<sup>10</sup>

The socio-political organization was almost as changeless as the cosmic order, and the body of knowledge which consisted of the magical formula necessary to influence the gods was therefore also static. Necessity had given the culture a materialistic direction, and most rituals were directed at obtaining material gains such as crops, pigs, wives etc. The idea of good was based on materialism, 'what furthers wealth is good'. When the white man appeared on the scene the traditional way of life was disturbed, but the need for material necessities obviously remained the same. However, the variety of material goods that could be obtained was widened considerably by the presence of the colonial powers, and with supreme logic the people of New Guinea adapted their traditional belief to the new situation and arrived at a belief whereby 'European goods (cargo) ships, aircraft, trade articles, and military equipment were not man-made but had to be obtained from a non-human or divine source',<sup>11</sup> through the familiar means of sacrifice, prayer etc. Although supremely logical and also reasonable in its attempt at sharing wealth on a more equal basis the movement became totally bizarre and ultimately destructive. It

included burning of crops, worshipping of aeroplanes and resulted in the killing of missionaries (for withholding the cargo) and war.

What connection does this system have with the role of the 'been-to' in modern West Africa? Armah sees the 'been-to' as the modern equivalent of the spirits who were supposed to produce the cargo. The living equivalent only 'fleshes out the pattern':

The main export to the other world is people. The true dead going back to the ancestors, the ritual dead. . . . At any rate it is clearly understood that the been-to has chosen, been awarded, a certain kind of death. A beneficial death, since cargo follows his return. (p. 223)

The emphasis on the importance of the been-to in terms of what cargo he brings is brought out in the reception which both Baako and Brempong receive. When Baako's uncle tells his mother on the phone that he has returned he uses the phrase 'I have a huge present waiting for you here' (p. 98), and one of the first things Baako's mother says to him is, 'When is yours coming, Baako?' (p. 101). Brempong's sister even calls him 'our white man' (p. 81), thus unconsciously echoing the allusion to the spirits or ghosts. Armah is not the only writer to take up this theme, it occurs in West African literature with a regularity which one suspects reflects the writers' own disillusionment at the welcome they had when they returned from overseas. The closest parallel to Baako is Obi in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The following quotation is part of the welcome address to Obi on his return to his village:

We are happy that to day we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour. . . . He traced the history of the Umuofia Scholarship scheme. . . and called it an investment which must yield heavy dividends.<sup>12</sup>

Western education replaces magic as the force which can produce the cargo, but it is noticeable that the been-to only conveys the goods, he does not produce them. He is 'not a maker, but an intermediary':



The idea that a ghost could be a maker . . . could also have something of excessive pride in it. Maker, artist, but also maker, god. It is presumably a great enough thing for a man to rise to be an intermediary between other men and the gods. To think of being a maker oneself could be sheer unforgiveable sin. (p. 224)

This idea was originally put forward by F. Fanon in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon sees the national bourgeoisie of the newly freed nation as a major impediment, not only to socialism, but to economic growth as such. He argues that it is a decadent class which can only imitate its European counterpart. 'It follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention'.<sup>13</sup> It has no interest in national development, neither does it possess any technical knowledge despite its university education. 'The national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type'.<sup>14</sup> Armah has even picked up Fanon's keyword and made it his own. Fanon says, 'The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary'.<sup>15</sup>

This hatred of the black bourgeoisie is one of the motivating forces behind *Fragments*. It explains the characters of Ashante Smith and Akosua Russell and the savage parody of pseudo-traditional poetry. The fact that Ashante Smith is said to be a caricature of Kofi Awoonor and Akosua Russell of Edua Sutherland only emphasises the loneliness of Armah's position and his alienation from the social class which produces most of West Africa's writers. Needless to say they do not share his vision of themselves. Kofi Awoonor says, 'I particularly think that Armah is much more concerned with the degree of despair, which at times is very relentless, much more relentless than is warranted by the conditions'.<sup>16</sup>

A society that regards a class of people as a conveyer belt for cargo is an alienated and dehumanized society, and this aliena-

tion on an economic level is bound to be reproduced on a personal level in the lives and relationships of the people who live in it. The result is that 'Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions'.<sup>17</sup>

As a logical correlative to the cargo cult the characters in *Fragments* mainly deal with each other in this fashion. The most obvious case is Baako's sister who refuses her husband sex to make him agree to outdoor the baby too early because 'An outdoor ceremony held more than a few days after payday is useless' (p. 125). Armah creates an image to symbolize this kind of relationship: 'the killing embrace of enemy insects crushing each others exoskeletons and squeezing out the pulp of life within in the unending destructiveness of life' (p. 128). The image is in fact an apt portrayal of all aspects of life as it is conceived within the linear movement of *Fragments*, thus affording maximum contrast to the cyclical movement.

The two movements not only contrast they also overlap, and when this happens the linear pattern always gains at the expense of the circular. This is symbolized visually in Baako's TV script by the fact that the 'white square is *superimposed*' upon the 'single dark screen' (p. 210 – my italics). In terms of the plot this is seen as a perversion of once meaningful rituals. At Brempong's arrival instead of the traditional gesture of washing his feet his sister *pours champagne over his shoes*, and the gesture wins approval precisely because it is a waste. It proves that there is 'more beyond' (p. 83 – my italics). The most important example of this, however, is the outdoor of the baby. The original meaning of the ceremony is lost, the two most important factors the timing and the libation are ignored, and instead the baby becomes a moneymaking object in the brashest fashion imaginable. The symbolism is very carefully sustained throughout the description of the ceremony; the baby is put 'on the porch, a square of the morning sunlight falling on

one side of a wide brass pan next to him. The fan stood behind the cradle' (p. 258). The fan is one of Araba's most valued possessions and ironically it is the very thing that kills the baby. With its circular form and destructive function it becomes a symbol of the perversion of the ceremony itself, a white circle. Its destruction of the baby also marks the breaking point of the hero. When he hears the baby crying Baako 'took the thing by its stem and yanked it in anger once. Sparks flew out in a small shower where the cord snapped at the base of the fan, and the clown let the heavy thing drop into the brass pan, still turning, scattering the gathered notes' (p. 266). Baako and the baby are in fact the same. In the hospital Baako muses 'there had been the other, the child that was to have grown to become him, but they had killed him' (p. 258). They are the family's investment in the future. The child is born soon after Baako's arrival, and it only survived because he rushed its mother to hospital thus saving both mother and child. Araba says, 'Now see, it is such a good thing, your coming. Already you have brought me this, the baby. Other blessings will follow, that I know' (pp. 121-22). The other blessings, the cargo, did not follow, and when at the outdoor ceremony they tried to extract it they went too far and caused Baako's total rejection of them, symbolized by the death of the baby and Baako's madness, which is a symbolic death. In a discussion about the feeling of Africans who try to assimilate into white culture and fail Armah says:

The resulting sense of despair . . . is excruciatingly keen. The vision is of the annihilation of the self, the feeling is that the subject has striven so valiantly only to become nothing. The deathwish is a natural consequence, probably resolving itself in most cases into a suicidal depression.<sup>15</sup>

In *Fragments* Armah has vented his anger on the native bourgeoisie rather than the white foreigners, but the feeling of alienation and bitterness created in Baako by that class is obviously no less vehement. *Fragments* is to a very large extent autobiographical, and it did not surprise anyone that Armah himself

chose to leave Ghana as a gesture of final rejection.

## NOTES

1. A. K. Armah, *Fragments* (London, 1968) p. 240. All farther references are to this edition and are included in the text.
2. G. Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (London, 1968) p. 171.
3. *Religion in Africa*, p. 25.
4. Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth My Brother* (London, 1972) p. 13.
5. Mircea Eliade,  *Cosmos & History* (New York, 1959) p. 83.
6. *Religion in Africa*, p. 73.
7. Lenri Peters, *Satellites* (London, 1969) p. 39.
8. A. K. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Nairobi, 1973) p. 53.
9. Achebe, Awoonor, Soyinka, *In Person* (Seattle, 1975) p. 14.
10. Peter Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo* (Manchester, 1971) p. 13.
11. *Road Belong Cargo*, p. 1.
12. C. Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London, 1972) p. 52.
13. F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1970) p. 123.
14. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 120.
15. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 122.
16. *In Person*, p. 147.
17. Eric Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London, 1973) p. 63.
18. A. K. Armah, 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?' in *Présence Africaine*, 'Homage à Langston Hughes', p. 17.

# Felix Mathali

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WRITE. . .

And a voice said to me  
‘Write,  
write in the sands  
in which we cavorted  
clothed in banana leaves  
and the breath of the lake  
write in the sands  
on which we dreamt dreams  
and saw visions  
write  
that they may also  
be blessed who suffer  
the lashes of a prison  
without walls  
who groan at the tread  
of jackboots without faces  
Write that they may be  
comforted. . .  
and a voice said to  
me  
‘Write,  
write on the sands on which  
we cavorted  
Clothed in the sands  
themselves  
And the breath of the lake  
Write and then rub

Yes rub and erase all  
    this in the waters  
of the lake  
because they were here  
    before  
they were here before  
    these waters  
they were here  
before archives began  
and the denigration  
    our life  
write and then erase  
    all this  
in the waters of the lake  
before historians disturb  
    what was  
while inventing what  
    was not<sup>1</sup>  
and a voice said to  
    me  
'Write. . .'

# Jack Mapanje

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## KABULA CURIO-SHOP

Black wood between carefully bowed legs  
– the eyes red over bellows and smoke  
the sharpening of axes, adzes, carvers,  
the chopping, the whittling and such  
carving such scooping and scooping  
then the sandpapering and smoothing;

Black wood between carefully bowed legs  
– such energy release and the price  
bargained away; would you imagine  
now a broken symbol thrown careless  
in the nook of a curio-shop: a lioness  
broken legs, broken neck, broken udder?

## REQUIEM

I still remember the songs  
The happy songs by the chaperons  
Of our village in the middle of the night:  
The child is born God bless him,  
The child is here Spirits spare him!  
And the ululations confirmed  
A sure-footed birth  
As the village blazed in bonfires,

Dust-bin drums carelessly talking.  
How the mother giggled digging up  
The child from an anthill!  
Mother told us at the fireside,  
And if there was blood  
In the breaking of the cord,  
They must have made sure to hide it.  
For I saw, I felt, I smelt nothing  
But the happiness of men and women  
Reeling to taut drums  
Roaring in jubilation of your birth, Son.

BERNTH LINDFORS

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## Egbe's Sworn Enemy: Soyinka's Popular Sport

Upon returning to the University of Ibadan in 1960 after more than five years of study and work in England, Wole Soyinka wrote a brief essay on 'The Future of West African Writing' for a young campus publication called *The Horn*.<sup>1</sup> In it he praised Chinua Achebe for displaying an 'unquestioning acceptance' of West African subject matter in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Soyinka believed that this 'seemingly indifferent acceptance' of one's own cultural milieu marked 'the turning point in our literary development', for it departed radically from the attitudes of earlier writers who had distorted African reality. Prior to Achebe there had been two unhealthy tendencies in African writing which invariably led to



literary disaster.

First, it was the alien transposition. Writers – casual writers mostly, magazines, radio, etc. – took their heroes from 'True Romances' and thought it was sufficient to give them an African name, and they could claim to have written an African tale, about Africans.

This kind of imitation, bad enough in fiction but absolutely atrocious in poetry, may have been caused by the authors' miseducation or lack of experience in writing. The result was a deplorable tradition of 'literary dishonesty'.

The other tendency in African writing was regarded by Soyinka as equally fraudulent:

After the phase in which it appeared that nothing in West Africa was literary-worthy unless that which could be made as untruthful to the subject character as a negro in tails playing a banjo, the sudden European fashion change which sought a new artistic titillation in African art and sculpture also added a new respectability to West African folk tales. It was then that we swung over to the opposite extreme. A sort of 'Untrue Romances'. The moonlight over the bathing naked maiden became, as long as it lasted for ten pages, the criterion of validity for the creative effort. European critics helped of course.

Soyinka went on to offer an illustration of how this type of literature was encouraged and what he once did to satisfy a demand for it.

I have, by a lucky chance, a very recent example of this hankering after the non-creative literary transcriptions. A university publication in England asked me for translations of 'authentic' African tales and songs. I said I could give them short stories and poems written by me, but no, they were only interested in 'authentic' stuff. Yes, I replied, but I do have material on folk themes, only I regret to say, they are original. No, they insisted, we must have translations. So, being by now accustomed to this sort of thing, I sent them a 'translation'. I have just received a copy of their latest issue with a 'West African Folk Tale', translated by me. Only you won't find it in any anthology and you won't hear it from your great grandmother.

The story referred to is no doubt 'Egbe's Sworn Enemy', which appeared in the April 1960 issue of *Geste*,<sup>2</sup> a mimeographed publication founded by the Union French Society at the University of Leeds, Soyinka's alma mater. It was a travesty of a traditional tale but Soyinka flavored it with so many folk motifs and pseudo-folk ingredients that it appeared genuine – at least to his ingenuous English editors who had adamantly insisted upon 'authenticity'. One could perhaps classify it as fakelore fabricated with malice aforethought or as a kind of covert popular literature produced as a private joke. To appreciate the mischief that went into its manufacture, it is necessary to reproduce the entire text before commenting on it.

### EGBE'S SWORN ENEMY: An African Folk Tale

From the beginning, Egbe was unchallengeable. His whims were decidedly annoying, and no one who cried for his help could say where Egbe was likely to leave him after the rescue. But since he was the one Rarifier who served the earth and the vault of spirits, it was not only foolhardy, but rather ungrateful to quarrel with him. Egbe was the breath of wind that fused with light and darkness and remained Egbe. He was the Spirit who absorbed the man on the precipice even in the moment of his transition from the pulse of flesh to the darkness of the understreams, and materialised him the world's length away from the hand of Fate. Egbe was the one Spirit who could reverse the needle of Fate and make her unstitch the red gory patterns which she is always embroidering while she licks her lips. Not that this distressed Igbehinadun unduly. Since she could always think of a more spectacular pattern for the same insect, she viewed Egbe's antics with no more than a bored amusement.

With the earth people, however, is it to be wondered at that a man who had just been whisked from the coils of a boa-constrictor

would not complain if he found himself in the very centre of a thorn-bush and arrived home bleeding from the nose to his ankles and back. The man would be too grateful for the yam pottage to think of the chips that had come off his favourite clay bowl. He would return and sacrifice a goat or two and show the thorn scratches to his neighbours as if this were a newly acquired talisman.

Is it, I ask you, the business of the passenger to deny the boatman his private jokes? And indeed, if a man merely summons Egbe and cries for help, is this not the same as if he said to the spirit, Take me where you will as long as I leave this spot. This leaves Egbe a free choice. And it is not many men who would remember to request that Egbe leave them in a shallow pool of rose-scented water where a circle of virgins await them with sponge and with freshly tapped wine.

But this is talking of ordinary men alone. There are those to whom one cannot apply these common rules, and one person, yes, a very mutual friend, has claimed that he chooses his destination very carefully and that, as far as he is concerned, Egbe is merely the driver of the cart and not the owner. One day, this person claims, he was swimming in the sea, and while he floated unsuspecting on his back and made small talk with the sun, this person claims that he was sucked under suddenly by a whirlpool which embraced him totally with the strength of twenty octopuses. But even as the eddy poured its black poisoned water into his mouth so that he could call no one for help, he not only succeeded in summoning Egbe to his side, but he told Old Rarifier just where he expected to be conveyed. And this was – to the moon – no less. Egbe was to whip him out of the sea, dry him with a cloth woven from the fleece of clouds, place him on the back of a hawk who would fly him directly to Apatumo, the god, who, with the moon-ring on his finger, controls the ebb and tide of the oceans, and from whom he would demand immediate punishment for the current which had so brutally assaulted his person.

And if you haven't guessed already, the hero of that story is

Awun, and in case there are people so ignorant that they do not know who Awun is, his other name is Ajapa, the tortoise. Egbe himself, however, tells another story. He says that it was entirely his idea to take Ajapa and leave him at the bedside of Atunomole's wife light-keeper of the moon. And Awun was never a man to be unduly troubled by such an unexpected situation, which, as everyone knows, is a recurring episode in the life-history of the cunning one. He had just begun to explore the hidden valleys of that delightful land when the husband arrived. Atunomole used no ceremony at all; he merely picked up the tortoise and flung him over the cliff. Awun fell for twenty-one days and twenty-one nights, finally hitting the roof of the Odoritan caves. And as proof of his story, Egbe points to Awun's shell, which since that day, has borne the scars of its tremendous crash from the height of the moon.

This was only the first of the many misadventures which Ajapa denies that he ever suffered from Egbe's hands. The one which took place after this, and which, from the news which seeps to us through earth runnels, set the Heavy People laughing in Orogho grove for twenty days or more, made Ajapa even more resolved to be avenged on Egbe.

To begin with, when Ajapa told the story of his trip to the moon, he was not aware that Egbe was listening, but Egbe had heard every word, and he is said to have told Kori, his half-brother that he would serve Awun in a very similar manner, only worse, if that unfortunate creature were ever to summon him again. This of course, Awun did not know.

It happened one day that Awun's wife, Yarinbo, ran out of firewood while she was preparing supper for her husband.

'Awun', she said, 'do go into the bush and get me some firewood'.

'What! At this time of the night?'

'But the food will be spoilt', Yarinbo pleaded.

'Then I will beat you for it', Ajapa replied.

Yarinbo thought for a few minutes. Then she said, 'Of course, if you are afraid to walk in the woods at night that is another matter'.

Everybody knows that Ajapa is a vain creature, and if you didn't I hope you will now understand how it came about that Ajapa, who, if not entirely a coward is not really the stout-hearted among men, came to be blundering into saplings at the darkest hour of the night. And need I add that it was not very long before Ajapa the Wealthy, Ajapa the Cunning, the Unequalled Liar and Unparalleled Boaster got totally lost in a small bush which was almost in his own backyard and found himself not far from the haunt of ghommids.

Firewood on his head, he began to shout for help, and very soon he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, but whether they belonged to a mortal or whether it was an earthquake which set the trees and the whole forest in motion was a lot more than he could tell.

Indeed this was a night of the monkey reaching for a coconut and finding that the whole palm tree has come tumbling down on his head. The neighbour who answered his cry was none other than Agbenigbere, the dewild whose twenty horns make him appear like a prickly pear, Agbenigbere whose garment is made of beaten human skull – this was the creature who approached the lost husband.

Ajapa did not think twice about the matter. He merely dropped on his belly and all you could see was the firewood. Agbenigbere came to the spot and sniffed. He was sure the noise had come from there. He looked up the trees to see if the intruder was hiding there and he pulled aside the bushes but there was no one to be seen. He was about to leave when he saw the bundle of firewood on the ground. Well, well, he said, someone has brought me a gift, and he picked it up.

All would have been well at that moment if Awun, incensed by this piece of impertinence had still succeeded in holding his peace. Clinging to the underside of the firewood where he could not be

seen, he shouted:

'That's right, you pawpaw-nosed, dung-covered pit of crawling maggots, go on, just pick up anything you find in the road and say it is yours'.

Agbenigbere spun on his hooves and looked everywhere. Nobody.

And again Tortoise abused him. 'One of these days you'll pick up another gift and find it is a nest of scorpions. And then you'll stink up the whole forest and you'll be so bloated and rotting that even your mother will refuse to own you'.

Agbenigbere gave a bellow of rage and began to tear up and down looking for his tormentor.

'Of course' sneered the tortoise, who as always, had now begun to enjoy himself so well that he had quite forgotten his danger. 'Of course' he sneered, 'that is assuming that you have a mother at all, because everybody knows that you were picked up inside elephant's vomit, on which you also happened to be dining at the time. Others say that you were simply blown into the world one day through the fart of hippopotamus, a more disgusting way to be born I cannot imagine. If you had any shame Agbenigbere, you would tie a stone around your . . . . . Ya oww'!

What caused the tortoise to cry out suddenly in pain was that Agbenigbere, goaded into frothing insanity by his unseen enemy, had seized the bundle of firewood in both hands and was using it to beat the surrounding bush, so that Ajapa's head came suddenly in hard contact with a tree-trunk. Too late for regrets now, he saw that Agbenigbere had heard the cry, realised at last that the voice came from the firewood, and before Ajapa could cry Yarinbo, he was in the steaming paws of Agbenigbere.

Agbenigbere seized the lizard neck of the tortoise and proceeded to pull him out of the shell. Ajap[a] thought of the supper awaiting him at home and summoned Egbe with the last puff of his breath. In an instant the Rarifier had snatched him and laid him, half-dead by the fireside in a little dark cottage not far from the spot, where a beautiful woman was preparing a meal with her

back to him.

Dazed and shaken though he was, the randiness never quite deserts Ajapa, who, even in his childhood days . . . and since there is no childhood companion of his alive today, we must accept his word . . . and his story is that before he was a week old he was banished by the king of his village for seducing his youngest wife. So, in his half stupor, he looked at this beautiful woman who had now half-turned her face towards him, and said, It seems to me that Yarinbo is more beautiful now than when I left home earlier this evening. And pulling himself up, a very painful process it was I must say, he grabbed the woman by the waist and said,

'Come on woman, I brought no firewood, so you can leave off the cooking. Come on Yarinbo, we'll find something better to do'.

The woman did not answer or take any notice of him.

Ajapa tried tickling her under the armpits, which succeeded because the woman leapt up immediately and then Tortoise recoiled, because he saw now that although one side of the woman's face was human, the other was a cesspit of swarming snakes.

'Ah! What is this'? Ajapa cried. 'What horrible joke is someone playing on me'?

The woman heard nothing; although Ajapa did not know this, she was quite deaf, having been battered on the ears too often by the brute she had for a husband. Her waist was scaly and hard like a crocodile and Ajapa could see now why she had felt nothing when he laid hands on her waist.

But the worst was now to come. Although he was truly sorry that he made advances to this creature, it became clear that the woman had formed an immediate attachment to him. When all is said and done, it must be remembered that Ajapa was not entirely a repulsive creature. He had short legs it is true, but his long and slim neck was the envy of many women. And this one whom he had disturbed now advanced on him, lifted him in one swoop and carried him struggling to bed. Ajapa let off a scream loud enough to wake the skulls in Agbenigbere's home, and who should walk into the house but that very man himself, yes, Agbenigbere was

the husband of the strange woman from whose clutches Ajapa was now trying to escape. He seized the woman and flung her with such force that she landed on the pot on the fire. Agbenigbere took the tortoise, whom his wife had now dropped on the bed, and lifted him in order to break him against the wall, when his wife leapt back into the fray and upset the entire mess of the boiling stewpot on Agbenigbere's head. In turn he dropped Ajapa and howled. His attention being now completely taken with his wife, whom desire had turned into a fury every bit as powerful as her husband, Ajapa was able to make good his escape and hide in the forest until dawn when he rejoined his despairing wife.

As you may imagine, Ajapa, even as he nursed his wounds had begun to nurse schemes for his revenge on Egbe, but the night is too far gone for that story and I do not wish to stumble into Agbenigbere's hut. If you soak the beans at night it needs less firewood in the morning.

Translated by WOLE SOYINKA

Soyinka has taken three of his major characters directly from Yoruba tradition. Awun, or Ajapa the tortoise, is the trickster figure in Yoruba folktales, and Yarinbo is well-known as his loyal but sometimes argumentative wife. Egbe, the Old Rarifier, is a personification of the metaphysical force or spirit believed to be endowed with magical power to transport living creatures from one place to another instantly.<sup>3</sup> Egbe can – indeed, *must*, – intervene in human affairs by coming to the rescue whenever anyone in distress calls his name. He is normally considered a dependable lifeguard, but Soyinka invests him with a mischievous sense of humour which is exercised to its fullest when he is called upon to rescue his enemies or detractors. He lifts ungrateful adversaries such as Ajapa out of hot water only to immerse them in a far larger sea of troubles.

The other characters in the story – Igbehinadun (literally 'The-end-will-be-sweet')<sup>4</sup> or Fate; Apatumo, the god with the moon-



ring who is said to control the ebb and tide of the oceans; Atunomole's wife, the light-keeper of the moon; Kori, the half-brother of Egbe; and the marvellous dewild called Agbenigbere (literally either 'He-who-carries-one-briskly' or 'He-who-carries-a-human-and-non-humans (statues)' or, more figuratively, 'The-fierce-strong-limbed-one') as well as his splendidly grotesque wife – appear to be Soyinka's creations. The few places named – Odoritan (a delightfully ambiguous term meaning either 'It-lies-in-the-realm-of-stories [myths]' or 'It-falls-on-the-thighs') caves and Orogbo (a-bitter-tasting-nut) grove – also bear no clear resemblance to known locales, real or mythical. Soyinka seems to have forged his setting and his supporting cast from the smithy of his own folk imagination.

The story is a reversal of the usual trickster tale, with the trickster himself being duped not once but twice by his 'sworn enemy', Egbe. To effect this turn-about convincingly, Soyinka equips Ajapa with a near-fatal flaw – a weakness for women – which is not usually one of the tortoise's idiosyncrasies in traditional Yoruba narratives.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Soyinka's randy protagonist stands ever ready and eager to perform his tricks in whatever bedroom he suddenly finds himself. When Egbe transports him from a treacherous whirlpool to the moon and leaves him at the bedside of Atunomole's wife, Soyinka assures us that 'Awun was never a man to be unduly troubled by such an unexpected situation, which, as everyone knows is a recurring episode in the history of the cunning one'. This statement, in addition to teaching us something new about the tortoise's behavior in the guise of a well-established fact, prepares us for the climactic episode in the story where another attempt at seduction of someone else's wife backfires hilariously.

Not everything is completely topsy-turvy in these farcical episodes, however. Ajapa's 'escapes' from his escapades are engineered by Soyinka with such an adroit blending of traditional and non-traditional motifs that this very tall tale takes on a speciously 'authentic' flavor. In the first misadventure Ajapa, flung

unceremoniously over a cliff by Atunomole, falls for twenty-one days and nights until he hits the roof of the Odoritan caves; 'since that day, (his shell) has borne the scars of its tremendous crash from the height of the moon'. This familiar-sounding etiological ending tends to validate the tale as traditional, even though in true Yoruba oral narratives Ajapa normally acquires his fractured shell by falling as he is climbing a rope to heaven<sup>6</sup> or by being chopped up and reassembled sloppily.<sup>7</sup> Tales explaining 'why the tortoise has a cracked shell' are of course legion not only in Africa but throughout many other parts of the world as well.<sup>8</sup> Soyinka's amusing bedroom-on-the-moon variant may have struck some of his English readers as genuinely African simply because it departed so widely from versions they knew. Soyinka's pastiche relies as much on his audience's vague familiarity with certain common folk motifs as it does on their unfamiliarity with the shape such motifs take in West African oral narratives.

The same point can be illustrated by examining the conclusion to the second erotic episode in Soyinka's story. Ajapa, once more caught in a compromising posture by an irate husband, manages to make a getaway when the husband and wife start battling over him. The story is reminiscent of traditional tales in which a trickster succeeds in setting two of his adversaries against one another,<sup>9</sup> but Soyinka gives the orthodox narrative line a few new twists. Ajapa, 'half-dead' from his terrifying encounter with Agbenigbere in the forest, revives quickly when he has the opportunity to make advances toward a woman he mistakes as his wife. The woman turns out to be a hideous monster who immediately falls in love with him and carries him off to bed. Worse yet, she turns out to be Agbenigbere's wife, and Agbenigbere finds them in *flagrante delicto* of sorts when he returns home. Ajapa does not trick them into fighting but makes an ignominious departure as soon as they are engrossed in their own domestic brawl. The so-called 'trickster' is thus depicted again as a blundering coward who can be easily victimized by his arch-enemy Egbe. By transforming 'Ajapa the Cunning' into a fool, Soyinka unites a convention of the numskull

tradition with a perversion of the trickster tradition. Burlesque permits such large-scale literary license.

Soyinka's Ajapa is himself an interesting study in contrasts. On the one hand, he remains – as in tradition – a creature of grand appetites who tries to take advantage of unstable situations by turning events in his own favor. He acts very much in character when he tries to exploit, insult or discomfit others, as he does, for instance, when being transported from the whirlpool or when taunting Agbenigbere in the forest. It is also not unusual for him to be outwitted occasionally by other tricksters, particularly his wife, who uses a very clever stratagem in this story to persuade him to gather firewood for her.<sup>10</sup> But on the other hand, we hardly ever see him behaving as a lusty paramour in African oral literature; the notion that he was so precociously libidinous that 'before he was a week old he was banished by the king of his village for seducing his youngest wife' appears to have no foundation in tradition, Yoruba or otherwise. And it is exceedingly odd to find him so outsmarted, so outmaneuvered and so out-and-out humiliated as he is in this story. Soyinka has turned him into a dull-witted, disaster-prone Don Juan.

The story is structured as a reduplicated sequence of comic reversals – that is, a string of events which is repeated twice, as if to emphasize that Ajapa is incapable of learning anything from past catastrophes. The sequence can be summarized as follows: (1) Ajapa in danger, (2) Egbe to the rescue, (3) Ajapa in greater danger, (4) ignominious escape. In the first episode, the danger of the whirlpool is canceled out by transportation to the moon, but there Ajapa's lust gets him into trouble with Atunomole and the consequence is a shattered shell. In the second episode, Ajapa is captured by Agbenigbere only to be transported to Agbenigbere's hut, where his lust puts him at the mercy first of Agbenigbere's even lustier wife and then of Agbenigbere himself; from this double jeopardy Ajapa is lucky to escape with his life. Reduplication of a particular motifemic sequence may not be a very typical narrative pattern for African trickster tales,<sup>11</sup> but at least it offers

the kind of repetition and cyclical movement one tends to associate with oral narrative art. Soyinka succeeds in making the story look like a folktale, even while departing from established norms of folktale construction.

Much of the humour in the story derives from the sudden reversals of fortune Ajapa experiences. Soyinka is continually surprising the reader with new information and unexpected events. We no sooner hear the tortoise shamelessly threatening to beat his wife if she fails to cook his dinner properly than we see him shamed into collecting the wood she needs for the fire. When Agbenigbere first appears, Ajapa hides in fear, but a few moments later he is boldly tormenting the monster with a stream of personal abuse, a stream that proves so effective in riling him that Ajapa begins to warm to the task, forgetting the danger he is in. He suddenly finds himself captured, escapes just as suddenly by appealing to Egbe, but then is thrust abruptly into another situation which soon turns out to be quite the opposite of what he had anticipated. Throughout the story we are forced to make rapid mental adjustments to keep up with the zany twists and turns of the plot. Unlike folktales, where the audience often is familiar with the direction and dénouement of the action, Soyinka's tale is a wild excursion through the seemingly conventional into the unpredictable unknown. The strategy of the story is to keep the reader permanently off balance.

Of course, some of Soyinka's humor is not intended for public consumption. He appears to be enjoying a huge private joke when he inserts into the narrative such statements as: 'if you haven't guessed already. . .'; 'it must be remembered that. . .'; 'everybody knows that. . .'; 'in case there are people so ignorant that they do not know. . .' – statements which encourage the reader to accept in good faith whatever nonsense Soyinka then puts forth as transparently traditional. Ajapa's libertinism is thus authenticated. So is his supposed attractiveness to women, despite the fact that he is ordinarily depicted in folk tradition as among the homeliest of creatures. Soyinka uses the authority of his narrative voice to

establish the patently false as unquestionably true. This is surreptitious comedy visible only to the perpetrator and to those few *consentit* who might happen to come across the tale. The joke would not be caught by most readers of the ephemeral university literary magazine in which this story made its only appearance. Soyinka appears to have been writing as much for his own private amusement as for the entertainment of his British academic audience. He was evidently relishing his role as a literary trickster.

Since 'Egbe's Sworn Enemy' cannot be classified as a folktale proper, since its tendency to mock the conventions of an entire narrative genre rather than those of a specific text lifts it beyond mere parody, since it was composed as an aberrant form of 'art for art's sake' (i.e., comic art intended partially for the private gratification of the artist alone) as well as a form of popular literature (i.e., narrative art intended for mass consumption), it is difficult to decide what to call this bizarre story. None of the old taxonomic labels seems to fit. Perhaps it would be best to call it a 'sport', using the term in the biological sense to designate a mutation displaying 'an unusual or singular deviation from the normal or parent type'.<sup>12</sup> 'Egbe's Sworn Enemy', in other words, is neither fish nor fowl, neither folk nor pop nor pure parody; rather, it is a rare and original specimen of comically elevated narrative art which exists in its own unique, submerged literary environment. By rescuing it from obscurity and placing it before a wider mass audience which can fully appreciate its entertaining peculiarities, we have added yet another dimension to its existence. It is still a sport, but now that it has been returned to a more public domain, it must be treated as a popular sport. True, you may not find it in any anthology and you may not hear it from your great-grandmother, but this does not diminish its authenticity and appeal as a work of native creative imagination. 'Egbe's Sworn Enemy' is a genuine West African fake tale concocted by a trickster-author who deserves commendation for good sportsmanship.

## NOTES

1. All quotations are from *The Horn*, 4, 1 (1960), pp. 10-16. For a history of this magazine, see W. H. Stevenson, 'The Horn: What it Was and What it Did', *Research in African Literatures*, 6 (1975), pp. 5-31.
2. *Gate*, 5, 8 (21 April 1960), pp. 22-26.
3. Egbe also appears in Daniel O. Fagunwa's Yoruba novel, *Ògùnjá Odé níni Igbé Inimáti* (Lagos, 1938), which was translated by Soyinka under the title: *The Forest of a Thousand Demons* (London, 1960); see pp. 16-17 of this translation.
4. Though this is not a traditional Yoruba name for the concept of Fate, it appears to have a special meaning for Soyinka, who uses it again in *A Dance of the Forests* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 50:

... When spells are cast

And the dead invoked by the living, only such  
May resume their body corporeal as are summoned

When the understreams that whirl them endlessly

Complete a circle. Only such may regain

Voice auditorial as are summoned when their link

With the living has fully repeated its nature, has

Re-impressed fully on the tapestry of Igbehinadun

In approximate duplicate of actions, be they

Of good, or of evil, of violence or carelessness;

In approximate duplicate of motives, be they

Illusory, tangible, commendable or damnable.

I am grateful to Dapo Adelugba of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan for this reference and for considerable help with Yoruba names and nuances in this story.

5. However, one can find a few examples of this trait in a collection of Yoruba tales published in German by Leo Frobenius, *Atlantis X: Die Atlantische Götterlehre* (Jena, 1926), No. 38, pp. 277-78; No. 39, pp. 278-79; No. 54, pp. 315-16.
6. See, e.g., 'Why the Tortoise's Shell is Cracked and Crooked', in *Nigerian Folktales*, ed. Barbara K. and Warren S. Walker (New Brunswick, N.J., 1961), pp. 27-29.
7. See Frobenius, No. 26, pp. 254-56; No. 54, pp. 315-16.
8. See, for example, a Baïla version in *African Myths and Tales*, ed. Susan Feldman (New York, 1963), pp. 182-84; and an Ila version in *The Ila-speaking People of Northern Rhodesia*, Vol. 2 (London, 1920), p. 373. The latter is numbered A2312.11 (origin of cracks in Tortoise's shell) in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, 1955).

9. The most common example is perhaps the 'Deceptive Tug-of-War' found in Walker and Walker, pp. 59-60; M. I. Ogunmefu, *Yoruba Legends* (London, 1929), pp. 71-72; Margaret I. Baumann, *Ajapa the Tortoise* (London, 1929), pp. 117-20; Kunle Akinsemoyin, *Twilight and the Tortoise* (Lagos, 1963), pp. 57-63, and other collections. I am grateful to Prof. William Bascom of the University of California at Berkeley for these references. The same tale, numbered 291 in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* (2nd ed., Helsinki, 1964), has been found in North and South America, Latin America and the West Indies.
10. Yarinbo proves herself Ajapa's equal in cleverness in 'How the Tortoise tried to outwit his wife Yarinbo' in *Folktales and Fables*, ed. Phebean Itayemi and P. Gurrey (London, 1933), pp. 85-86.
11. Lee Haring has identified a typical motifemic sequence in African trickster tales to be: (1) False Friendship, (2) Contract, (3) Violation, (4) Trickery, (5) Deception, (6) Escape; for further details, see his article, 'A Characteristic African Folktale Pattern', in *African Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Garden City, N.Y., 1972), pp. 165-79. Alan Dundes comments on a related pattern in 'The Making and Breaking of Friendship as a Structural Frame in African Folk Tales' in *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, ed. Pierre Maranda and Elli K  ng  s Maranda (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 171-85.
12. This definition is taken from *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1967), p. 1373.

## Michael Ayodele

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### NIGERIAN CLOTH PAINTINGS

Michael Ayodele is a Yoruba artist who studied under Twins Seven Seven and who now lives in Zaria in Northern Nigeria. His drawings are always of traditional Yoruba themes and his media is Indian ink on white cotton.



Here is the God of Children being worshipped.  
(55 x 85 cm, black and white) Photograph by Jørgen Therkildsen.





Here are children swimming away their sickness inside the Godly river called Omبود River.

(175 x 85 cm, colour) Photograph by Jørgen Therkildsen.



Here is the female natural ruler in a special dress with the beaded drums during the New Yam Festival.

(55 × 85 cm, black and white) Photograph by Jørgen Therkildsen.



Here is a new King being escorted to his Palace followed by some of the King's Makers and some of his Wives.

(40 × 170 cm, black and white) Photograph by Peter Højrup.

# Okot p'Bitek

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## INTERVIEW

Okot p'Bitek visited Aarhus University during the autumn of 1977. During that term Kirsten Holst Petersen was teaching a class on East African Literature. Okot p'Bitek agreed to meet the class and answer the following questions that had been prepared by the students.

*How much is the style of Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol influenced by the African oral tradition?*

I don't think they are very much influenced by the African oral tradition; they cannot be sung, for instance. Possibly they are influenced by *The Song of Hiawatha* by H. W. Longfellow and also by *Song of Solomon*. These books I enjoyed very much when I was a student and I consider *Song of Solomon* the greatest love song ever.

*What about the imagery you use, is that your own or is it borrowed from traditional literature?*

It is based mainly on the traditional, I think, but one is bound to be influenced by friends, enemies, school, etc., so it becomes all mixed up.

*To what extent is Lawino a character in her own right and to what extent is she a representative of a class?*

First of all she has my mother's name. My mother was a very important woman in my life and she taught me a lot. She was very talented and composed 34 of the songs in *Horn of My Love*. Like my mother, Lawino isn't impressed by little gadgets like tape-recorders and all silly things you collect from the outside. But Lawino is not only an individual character, she is also a representative of the kind of despised, oppressed members of society. She is a village woman, examining society with the viewpoint of the village and I think she does it well.

*Why did you leave out the last section of Song of Lawino when you translated it?*

Well, there is this very difficult concept based on a cooking place which is the backbone of the last chapter. When you make a cooking place, you place three stones to support the pot over the fire. If the pot is big enough, it will fit, but if the pot is too small, you need another piece of stone to support it. That piece of stone we call *ten*. This is a physical thing but there is a social implication which is that a grown-up person doesn't need this social *ten*. He is an independent person who doesn't need all sorts of people to support him with their ideas of political systems, marriage systems, etc. But you know, translation is a terrible thing because you are not only translating words, you're translating concepts from one culture to another and you need to know both well before you can transfer these great ideas and compare them.

*Why did you retain the early Christian misunderstandings like, for instance, the 'clean ghost'?*

Because there is no word for holy in my language, so I think it was very kind to put that clean in. When the early missionaries came, they called it the white ghost which also has racial implications and as God at one point was interpreted as white father, the natives mixed this concept up with the colonials.

*What about hunchback?*

Oh, hunchback, that is a fantastic concept. In 1911 some Italian priests came to Northern Uganda. They collected some of the people and after greeting them one of the priests asked, 'Who created you'? Now, in my language there is no single word for create, but worse still, there is no word for creating out of nothing. So the interpreter said, 'This is impossible to translate, what exactly are you talking about? Give us one specific sense of the verb, to create'. Then this Italian fool, having Genesis in mind, said, 'who moulded you'? Now the elders thought this man was nuts, but one of them said, 'If an otherwise healthy person becomes a hunchback, he is moulded'. Almost every disease has a spiritual counterpart, and the spiritual counterpart of tuberculosis of the spine is called *Lubanga*. So one of the elders said, 'I think he is asking us about the spiritual counterpart of the tuberculosis of the spine', so the answer he gave was *Lubanga*. On Sunday the Italian priest gathered the people and said, 'I have come to tell you about a God who loves you very much, he is called *Lubanga*'. Once more we are dealing with translations, aren't we?

*At one point Ocol is questioning Socialism. Is he serious or is he mocking?*

I think human beings are much more complicated than you think. You are not just one person in the morning, afternoon and all the time. Even an Ocol can sometimes cast doubt in his own mind, everybody has these moments of doubt. So I don't think he is mocking, I don't know, how do I know?

*What social values do you wish to expose in Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol?*

Lawino is very unhappy with the suppression of man in society and with the fact that all African leaders are thieves. She raises

very basic questions such as do we actually understand Christianity. Another aspect dealt with is my favourite one, the question of time: must we be servants of time, or should time serve man?

*What is the role of women in African society?*

Is it very different from the role of women anywhere else? Being good mothers, for instance, and good wives? What kind of role do you have in mind?

*Does she have the same possibilities as a man if she wants an education, for instance?*

I think all societies in history have some way of passing on their morality to the next generation, so there was a tradition before the British came, only they established the formal institutions. As Western civilization was greatly influenced by the teachings of St Paul, who was a great woman-hater, they built more schools for males than for females and in that way the prejudice against women was transferred to Africa as far as this formal education was concerned. Even today you still have fewer schools for women. After Independence, of course, women wanted the right to vote, salaries were made equal and today we have the Women's Liberation Movement which again comes from Europe and America. But it doesn't seem to fit in very well and I think we are going to raise some even bigger issues, for instance what kind of family do we want in terms of the role of the woman, the role of the man, and the role of the children. You have to talk about the whole philosophy of a society, you have to ask questions like what kind of society do we want in terms of roles.

*What is your opinion of negritude?*

Well, I don't like it very much, but perhaps I should explain it in terms of history, in terms of the colonial powers and their impact

on the cultures of the people. I think the French were more thorough in their strangling of the natives in West Africa than the British were when they operated in Nigeria and Ghana, for instance. The French wanted to turn their subjects into real Frenchmen. With the coming of the political agitation for independence, the advocates of negritude began to say, we are not Frenchmen, but they were addressing the French. I think the movement came and went and I think it has been very powerful.

*Do you feel an affinity with other African writers?*

I think they're all more or less engaged in the same search for a useful society, especially after Independence, and by implication offering solutions. I don't read other people very well, I read very fast because I tend to get influenced.

The interviewers were: Dorte, Margot, Anne, Dorte, Susanne, Ragnhild, Bent, Karin, Gunhild, Else, Annemarie.



## A Connection of Images: the structure of symbols in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Ayi Kwei Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, has presented problems for most readers. There has been a general admission that it is a work which deserves high praise but most have been decidedly uncomfortable with Armah's obsession with filth and decay. Yet it is precisely this obsession which shows Armah's technical abilities and which helps to define the full meaning of the novel. There is a depth to the work which can only be plumbed by an extended analysis of the novel's imagistic structure. Such an analysis can demonstrate it to be a subtle creation which reveals a multitude of ideas, finally brought together in a meaningful whole in the last pages of the novel. On the surface, the work is an examination of one man's attempt to remain honest in the face of the mass corruption which Armah sees in Ghana today. The novel begins in the third person in a highly descriptive section. The narration then changes to a mixture of third person and first person in which the thoughts of the hero are revealed. The final part, again in the third person, shows the action which results from the situation described in the earlier passages. Whether in the first or third person, the point of view is always that of the hero, 'the man.' He is given no name and his actions or inactions and those around him complement this lack of identity. He seems an existential everyman, much like a Camus hero. He is in a state of abandonment and anguish and is utterly alone. He is

searching for some way to identify who he is and what he should be. With the exception of those who have made a god of money the other characters are in much the same state. A clerk says, 'There was nobody, Me alone.'<sup>1</sup> A caesarean birth is described as the child 'dragged out of its mother's womb,' (p. 97) At a later point, (p. 117) the man sweeps a mouse's home into the rubbish in the same arbitrary manner as his own life is being swept away.

The point of view is therefore essentially one of despair. Hope seems futile: 'When all hopes had grown into disappointment there would be no great unwillingness about the final going.' (p. 152) The man has a need for love, for some kind of human connection, but it is unfulfilled. In terms of sex, there is a constant image of impotence, both figuratively and actually. The futility of life leads the hero to be alone in despair but 'inside himself the man felt a vague but intense desire, something that seemed to be pushing him into contact, any kind of contact, with anything that could give it.' (p. 93)

There are therefore a multitude of communication images in the novel. The man works on the telegraph at the railway office but it is almost impossible to make meaningful connections with other operators. He attempts to find meaning in the many lines showing the movement of trains but this also proves inconclusive. A disembodied hand at the other end of the telegraph says, 'Why do we agree to go on like this?' (p. 26) Later, the man sees a number of poles connected together by electrical lines. This positive image is quickly dismissed on the human level when he notices by the pole a young girl, unable to find her personal connection.

These attempts at communication are confined by the journeying images. Each of these journeys seem to hold some hope of meaningful quest but that hope inevitably proves fruitless. The novel opens with the bus journey which only leads to the man being thrown off the bus. The man walks down the tracks again attempting a connection without success. On another trip by train, when he arrives at the station 'he saw the mess of some

traveller's vomit.' (p. 102). He then sees two men from the south who have come to the metropolis to make their fortune: 'It is possible that far away somewhere, young men sigh in the night and dream of following these, but they certainly do not know the end of the journey.' (p. 102) The end of the journey is that vomit.

To a great extent, the response to this dilemma is simply numbness, often sleep. In the opening bus sequence, the conductor fears the man is watching him count his money but he soon learns 'the watcher was no watcher after all, only a sleeper.' (p. 5) When the man tries to make love to his wife, he cannot break through her sleep. (p. 97) Then he turns to sleep himself and dreams of his school years: 'In the examination hall he finds all movement impossible, so that he cannot even tell if he knows any answers.' (p. 98) Yet even in this sleep there seems some hope. The man says of the Teacher, 'once he asked whether it was true that we were asleep, and not just dead, never to aspire any more.' (p. 90)

Even if this numbness is only a dormancy, something is needed to break it. The usual definition of the existential position is that existence precedes essence. For things other than man, the concept or the ideal, the essence can precede existence. The idea of a chair can precede the existence of a chair. For the individual man, however, the situation is reversed. Not having been given his essence before existence he must find it himself. Some men posit a God which gives them an essence which does precede existence. Others seem to find a worldly ideal, like the money-god which serves the majority of the Ghanaians. The man has neither of these and must find his own.

He first turns to the idyllic past. He says, 'the listening mind is disturbed by memories of the past.' (p. 66) He remembers a youth of clean water and clear sunlight: 'Th ere was something there which I know we have lost these days.' (p. 77) In that era, there was the oppressive power of the white men with their white bungalows and their black servants but he still felt 'without the belittling power of things like these we would all continue to sit underneath old trees and weave palm wine dreams of beauty and happi-

ness in our amazed heads.' (p. 93)

Yet is this primitivism only a dream? The representative of this primitive ideal seems to be the naked man, the Teacher, who looks to the past. He sees life in terms of Plato's cave metaphor: 'I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But then the same men, when they had power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful.' (p. 91) It is not that man cannot see the naked truth but that he finds it expedient to ignore it: 'men would laugh with hate at the bringer of unwanted light if what they knew they needed was the dark.' (p. 78)

If the Teacher does perceive the ideal, however, it does not give him happiness: 'in spite of all the outhter calm he too was in pain.' (p. 83) He says of himself, 'I have tried to be free but I am not free.' (p. 54) Even if he has the ideal, he is in despair because it leaves him without connections to the outside world; he is 'living my half-life of loneliness.' (p. 55) He also is beyond hope: 'it is not a choice between life and death but what kind of death we can bear in the end. Have you not seen there is no salvation anywhere?' (p. 55) If there is any salvation it is only 'within the cycle of our damnation itself.' (p. 55) His position is in the end little better than the zombies around him: 'I also am one of the dead people, the walking dead.' (p. 60)

There are a number of other characters who seem close to some kind of ideal. Kofi Billy joins the man in following Maanan but the former's search only ends in suicide, feeling 'in the very long lines of people I am only one.' (p. 73) Maanan herself, as the name suggests, brings a manna of sorts in the wee, the drug. The man says the drug enables them 'to see beyond the pain of the moment.' (p. 69), to see 'the deep, dangerous kind of truth.' (p. 69)

If this drug does seem an aid to a true perception, the imagery surrounding it should provide some clues to the pattern which Armah is creating. The wee is usually smoked when near the sea. After taking the drug (p. 70), they immediately get a strong smell of 'shit' and then they turn to the clear water. The clear water of

the sea has already been noted as an idyllic reference. The 'shit' usually seems to signify the filth of society, although, as shall be seen below, it eventually assumes a number of ambiguous dimensions.

Therefore, the drug, taken by the sea, reveals the filth, that dangerous truth. Then, after the wee, the man sees the water come alive. It comes towards him and he sees 'the land answering the movement.' (p. 71) In tune with the novel's concern for connection, this seems to be a connection in nature, a representation of a possibility not found with the trains or the telegraph. The drug provides an opportunity for this relationship which is so difficult to achieve.

Thus in the past there seems to have been an achievement of some ideal by Maanan but this ideal is not sufficient. She transfers her faith to a young lawyer and gets 'a happy light in her eyes' (p. 83) This light cannot last either, however, and the man sees her at the end of the novel in the depths of madness.

The lawyer to whom she turns is another failed ideal. His speech seems to hold great possibilities in terms of Armah's beliefs: 'We do not serve ourselves if we remain like insects, fascinated by the white people's power . . . We are our own enslavers first. Only we can free ourselves.' (p. 85) He seems to overcome his isolation when he says 'I am nothing. I have nothing' (p. 85) and puts his faith in the group, the people at large. But now, years later, he acts with the same unfeeling superiority as the other rulers. The man asks, 'How could this have grown rotten with such obscene haste?' (p. 86) The answer seems to be inherent in the glory of the lawyer's own ideal: 'It was his own youth that destroyed him with the powerful ghost of its promise.' (p. 86)

It is perhaps in one of the shortest characterizations that Armah shows the essence of the failure of the ideal. A young man rejected the evils of society and assumed an eastern faith and called himself Rama Krishna. He made a 'long and tortured flight from everything close and everything known since all around him showed him the horrible threat of decay.' (p. 47) He quotes

Gioran, the Prophet, that man would 'like an air plant be sustained by the light.' (p. 47) But man must kill to eat: 'Let it then be an act of worship.' (p. 47) However, Rama Krishna is unable to rise above the evil acts that life requires and in his avoidance of outward decay, the inside of his body decays before its time.

Rama Krishna's death and the failure of the other idealists seem to show an inadequacy in the absolute acceptance of any ideal. The most absolute, Rama Krishna, leads only to the greatest inward decay. The ideal found by Maanan, in the connection to the sea, that found by the Teacher in his perception of the light, and that of the lawyer, in the collective will, all seem to have possibilities but they too prove insufficient.

This multitude of ambiguous ideals is reflected in the many light images. At times the light seems to represent a true ideal and at others a false glitter. In the first line of the novel, 'THE LIGHT from the bus moved uncertainly . . .' (p. 1) Then the bus driver has difficulty lighting a match. As the man walks down the road, bright headlights blind and immobilize him. In the office the light is dull. (p. 14) Another light image, 'the gleam,' is used to represent the money lust which drives the majority of the people. Even at home, the man finds no escape: 'home, the land of the loved ones, and there it was only the heroes of the gleam who did not feel they were strangers.' (p. 35) The gleam seems to be a comment on the man's own inadequacy: 'That has always been the way the gleam is approached, in one bold, corrupt leap that gives the leaper the power to laugh with contempt at those of us who still plod on the daily road, stupid, honest, dull, poor, despised, afraid.' (p. 95)

The references above to the light of the bus, the car and the match suggest that the light does not signify one simple meaning. Life in general seems to be a series of unsteady lights which are inadequate to clear perception but the bright light associated with the worldly successful doesn't seem to be an improvement. At one point, when the man is walking, he finds that the bright headlights only make the night darker. (p. 48) This paradox continues

in the image of the gleam. The man speaks of the 'the ambiguous disturbing tumult within awakened by the gleam.' (p. 23) 'It was getting harder to tell whether the gleam repelled more than it attracted, attracted more than it repelled, or just did both at once in one disgustingly confused feeling all the time.' (. 10)

At one point, near the centre of the novel, the man has a dream which revolves around these light and dark images and at the same time deepens and explains them. The scene opens with the man and a companion. They are struck with 'blinding lights, wild and uncontrolled, succeeded by pure darkness, from which the recognized self emerges.' (p. 99) They are moving away from the dark, low hovels towards white towers. They are 'happy in the image of the future in the present'. (p. 99) Then the brutal lights confuse him and he is immobilized but his companion goes on, her own eyes shining. The man is unable either to return to the hovel of the past, the low, the dark, or to reach the tower of the future, the high, the white. 'All he can feel now is the cold, and a loneliness that corrodes his heart with its despair, with the knowledge that he has lost his happy companion forever, and he cannot ever live alone.' (p. 100)

The man is without companions and yet he is unable to be content with loneliness. Whether the light is the false god of money or the true ideal it is too powerful for the man to confront. Around him he knows others are able to follow it. He is left in limbo, neither dark nor light, neither happily social nor happily alone, a part of neither the idyllic primitive past nor the progressive future.

To discuss images in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* must lead one eventually to the omnipresent 'shit.' From the beginnings of the novel the reader is met by visions of excrement, vomit, spit and rot. The clean-up campaign in the town is shown to be totally ineffectual. Everywhere the man runs into 'the unconquerable filth.' (p. 23) At the same time as this filth is piling up, however, the filth inside seems to be blocked up. When Estella goes to the lavatory to answer 'Nature's call,' she is confronted by a man's

constipation. (p. 133)

There seems to be an almost constant picture of this rot and decay. The organic decay of the wood of the banister is unstoppable. (p. 12) The timberman worries that this wood will rot. (p. 29) The sea salt is eating the walls. (p. 20) The man recalls 'the rot of the promise' of independence. (p. 88)

The man must deal with this universal decay and the filth on the streets. 'Sometimes it is understandable that people spit so much, when all around decaying things push inward and mix all the body's juices with the taste of rot.' (p. 40) As in the case of Rama Krishna, the decay is within and must be met or else it will eat out everything.

The meaning of this confrontation is found in a short passage in which the man recalls seeing the picture of the old manchild. It seems unnatural 'but of course, it, too, had a nature of its own, so that only those who have found some solid ground they can call the natural will feel free to call it unnatural.' (p. 62) For the man such clean distinctions do not exist. He must learn to accept the unnatural natural, the natural which at first glance seems unnatural. This process is continued with the 'shit' and the rot: to avoid decay is 'an unnatural flight.' (p. 48) One is reminded of Norman O. Brown's comments on Swift in which he suggests that Swift's purpose is to make the reader realize that the physical processes are as much a part of man as his intellectual or spiritual elements.<sup>2</sup> Armah also pushes the reader to see the natural for what it is. When Oyo doesn't want her husband to see her naked she is avoiding the natural. She wants a wig like Estella has but elsewhere the man says wigs are 'human hair scraped from which decayed white woman's corpse?' (p. 88)

The wig is the truly unnatural, a turn to death and a evil decay. Instead, the man must learn how to deal with the natural decay: when his blockage ceases and he can get release in the latrine, he no longer keeps his hand off the rotting banister but 'lets it slide greasily down.' (p. 110) As the Teacher says, 'out of decay and the dung there is always a new flowering.' (p. 84)



This is the real meaning of the 'vision of shit' in the novel. If one recalls the uses of light imagery, the following could be revealing: 'occasionally the naked bulbs of street lamps shed a little light on holes in the backwalls of bathrooms.' (p. 93) It is perhaps in the latrine that a real insight may come. In this use of Plato's cave metaphor, the Teacher asserts 'The naked body is a covering for a soul once almost destroyed, now full of fear for itself ... This naked body' has an outward calmness about it, but inside it how much power is lying hidden from the watching eye ...' (p. 77) The body seem to be a barrier around the ideal that is the soul. At one time the Teacher 'parted everything so clearly into the light and shadow' but now he speaks in 'words that mix the beauty with the ugliness.' (p. 78)

The only hope today seems to be not in despairing about this need to mix but to explore it. It is no longer possible to follow an ideal which avoids the physical reality. The two are joined, like the naked body and the soul. They may be inhospitable toward each other but they cannot be separated. Those, like Estella, who follow the false ideal of the gleam of money and who reject the natural processes are in error. Instead, one must go both ways, combining a true ideal, a true light, and the awareness of and the acceptance of the natural decay that is a part of life.

A final major image to be examined is that of the sea. Above, the sea has been linked to an idyllic past. The man sees in the sea 'this clearness, this beautiful freedom from dirt. Somehow there seemed to be a purity and a peace here which the gleam could never bring.' (p. 23) He feels 'the breeze blowing in from the sea, fresh in a special organic way that has traces of living things from their beginnings to their endings.' (p. 77) The sea becomes an image of a clear, organic ideal, part of the natural process, as in that one positive connection where the land and the sea seem to meet one another. (p. 71) Yet even here there is an ambiguity. Part of this natural process is as evil in appearance as the natural process is as evil in appearance as the decay on land. The man sees a dead fish 'dancing quite violently up and down with the little waves.

When he looked closer he saw a whole lot of little fishes eating the torn white body, breaking the water's surface at dozens of small points.' (p. 129)<sup>3</sup> The sea suggests an ideal but also the impurity of that ideal. For the man 'the thoughts rising from the sea all have a painful hopelessness.' (p. 111)

Following these image patterns, one perceives certain thematic concerns. The man is seeking connections and communication, often symbolized in journeys and various modes of transportation. He has turned to a number of ideal characters but all have in the end somehow failed him. The images of light suggest both the true ideal and 'the gleam', the money-lust that drives his fellow countrymen. In either case, the light for him is uncertain but he is unable to deal with a bright light. He has a need to accept the natural processes around him, the decay and the rot, and learn how to function while including them. Finally he looks to the sea as the hope for an ideal but even there all in the end seems 'a painful hopelessness.'

This thematic pattern may now be applied to the ending of the novel, to see what Armah's seemingly despairing conclusions really mean. First, however, it is necessary to examine the one other central character of this section, Koomson.

Koomson seems a representative of the evil seekers of the gleam who have taken on the old white ways and a new corruption to further their own wealth. Koomson is an ex-fisherman and is associated with the wharves, which seem the most evil element connected to the sea: 'The wharves turned men into gulls and vultures, sharp waiters for weird foreign appetites to satisfy, pilots of the hungry alien seeking human flesh.' (p. 89)

The man sees at this point that there are truly 'no saviors. Only the hungry and the fed.' (p. 89) The Teacher, Maanan and the others cannot act as saviors. Yet, the man says, 'And then Koomson comes, and the family sees Jesus Christ in him.' (p. 92) To accept such a character as an ideal appears ludicrous. One should recall, however, the ambiguity of all the seemingly positive characters and images. Koomson's name could imply 'come

soon,' a Christian phrase of salvation. At best, of course, this is a limited salvation but the suggestion cannot be easily dismissed, as a close analysis of the final action will reveal.

After the coup, Koomson becomes the scapegoat, the sacrifice. When the man finds Koomson in his home, it is Koomson that is now most attacked by the light. His white shirt, the reminder of his colonial pretensions, also attacks him with light. Koomson is in dire fear of the brightness. He is in a state of constipation like the man in the latrine, unable to answer 'nature's call.' He gives off a smell of 'corrosive gas.' (p. 153) Now, to escape, they must go through the latrine, through the hole. They are figuratively going through the process of expelling the inner decay and of dealing with the natural man. Then they go to the converted lavatory by the sea.

The boat in which they will escape has been called the 'Ahead.' As a corrupt fishing boat belonging to Koomson, it has symbolized the 'leap of the gleam,' but it now takes on a new meaning. The name suggests hope at the same time it recalls the 'head,' the sea-going toilet. The natural process continues, only now on that source of the ideal and the connections, the sea:

The sea became something more visible as the spume began to rise in the wake of the boat, and the receding town, with its weak lights, now seemed to be something apart, something entirely separate, from the existence of the man. Further out the wake began to shine briefly with the phosphorescence of the sea, and the man leaned over and for a while was able to forget everything as he looked at the strange, soft, watery light.

Then the smell of shit which had never really left him, became even stronger, and when he turned he saw Koomson next to him. (p. 174)

The man seems to have reached the organic ideal of the sea. He feels that the evil town is receding. The gleam seems to be weakening but at the same time he discovers a gentle, 'soft, watery light.' In the end, however, even here he cannot escape that 'smell of shit,' the decay that is a part of life. Koomson is not a true saviour but an agent of 'the salvation within the cycle of damna-

tion' (p. 55) for the man. He brings the man out to the sea, the ideal, the soul, and at the same time provides a reminder that the man cannot leave the physical self.

The man then leaves the boat to return to land. The connection to the sea is intensified therefore on his return and, to extend this relation even more, he swallows some of the water as he enters. He swims to the centre of an inner tube which has been thrown from the boat and makes for the beach. 'He had begun to feel much colder too. But at the same time, even the cold feeling gave him a vague freedom, like the untroubled loneliness he had come to like these days, and in his mind the world was so very far away from the welcoming sand of the beach beneath him.' (p. 176)

In the inner tube, where he gets to the centre of things, he is able to return from the sea to the shore. Now he is no longer in despair but has found an 'untroubled loneliness,' 'a vague freedom.' In a later novel, *Fragments*, Armah speaks of nexology<sup>4</sup>, a theory that the truth can be found in the centre where one accepts all sides and all movement. Here, from the centre of the inner tube, the man has reached a point where he is between and accepting all of the parts, all of the polarities: 'When he awoke he felt very cold in the back, though already the sun was up over the sea, its rays coming very clean and clear on the water, and the sky above all open and beautiful.' (p. 177)

Then he sees the madwoman, whom he perceives as Maanan. She says, 'They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it, when they have mixed it all with so many other things?' (p. 177-178) She cannot find an absolute ideal because the answer is just such a mixture of all the polarities. Then the man looks at the inner tube: 'The rubber tube was floating away to the east with the current, rising coming forward every now and then and being sucked rapidly back, then lingering until another wave took it again forward and farther to the east.' (p. 178) Again there is the image of the centre, going back and forth within that organic image of the ideal but here the end result is a slow 'forward.' It is limited, but there seems some

hope for progression.

Back on land, the old bus and the bribery show that things have not changed. But on the bus there is an oval with a flower in the centre and a message, 'The beautiful ones are not yet born.' The man sees the printed words 'flowing up, down, and round again.' (p. 180) The oval seems an egg image and the movement of the words recalls the inner tube in the sea. The flower suggests the Teacher's belief that a flower will rise from the decay and the dung. With the addition of the words themselves, there seems to be an implication that the present evil state of affairs does not deny the possibility of a positive future.

The novel ends with again a latrine image and a bird happily flying off. One would assume that the bird is the chichidodo. Earlier in the novel, Oyo called the man a chichidodo, because, like the bird, he hates excrement but his favourite food is the maggots which feed on the excrement. (p. 44) It seems that by the end of the novel, the man is no longer the same as the bird. Or, perhaps, he still rejects the excrement and eats the maggots but now has confronted the filth on which the maggots must feed. The man ends with 'the never-ending knowledge that this aching emptiness would be all that the remainder of his own life could offer him.' (p.180) And yet, somehow, that aching emptiness seems a meaningful state, even an accomplishment.

This very limited hope is defined in a song quoted early in the novel, on the man's visit to the Teacher:

Those who are blessed with the power  
And the soaring swiftness of the eagle  
And have flown before,  
Let them go.  
I will travel slowly,  
And I too will arrive. (0. 50)

As the man says, 'someone must have felt something very deeply to have cried out these long sounds of despair refusing to die.' (p. 51)

This seems to be the positive end of the novel. The man reaches the centre and makes the needed connection of polarities but even here he cannot discover an absolutely positive answer. Shortly after the above quotation, in speaking of the war, the man suggests that 'victory itself happens to be the identical twin of defeat.' (p. 63) If this is true, one would assume the opposite is also the case and defeat is the twin of victory. The man enters the sea and goes through a change but it is not from sadness to joy but from complete despair to that 'despair refusing to die.'

#### NOTES.

1. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (New York: Collier, 1969), p. 15. All future references are to this edition and will be included in the text.
2. Norman C. Brown, 'The Excremental Vision,' *Life Against Death* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), pp. 179-201.
3. This short quotation could be interpreted in other ways. It might be seen as a natural reflection of the dog-eat-dog world of the seekers of the gleam. Another, more tenuous but more hopeful meaning could be that the torn white body of the colonial aftermath will be destroyed by the little fishes, the people of Ghana. These interpretations are not definitive, nor do they alter the above analysis but they are given here to suggest the depth that one can find in Armah's images.
4. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (New York: Collier, 1971), p. 230.

## A Note on Okonkwo's Suicide

There seems to be no general critical agreement as to the reason for the suicide of Okonkwo, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*.<sup>1</sup> Gerald Moore in his *Seven African Writers* simply records the incident,<sup>2</sup> his only clue as to its interpretation being his earlier statement that 'Okonkwo cannot reconcile himself to the paralysis of will which he senses around him'. In Arthur Ravenscroft's monograph the emphasis is slightly different: 'he hangs himself, not to avoid arrest but out of despair for the future of his people'.<sup>3</sup> G. D. Killam in his more extended study of the writer is even less committal. Observing simply that 'Okonkwo's suicide is reported off-stage',<sup>4</sup> he neglects entirely the question of motive, contenting himself with the admitted dramatic irony of Okonkwo having provoked the very kind of shame he fought all his life to avoid.

The reticence of such an impressive battery of critics is perhaps nevertheless hardly surprising since, suicide being the most private of acts, the question of its motivation is especially delicate. In a case like this where the novelist himself has displayed considerable tact, a critic who imposes too strict an exploration is apt to betray himself. The difficulty here is pre-eminently one of submitting the event to a reasonable perspective. Intuition can only help the reader if he has an intimate awareness of the cultural context – pre-colonial Igholand – and not many of Achebe's commentators have. It is not, however, any more fraught an issue than other refinements of motive in a book whose style precludes full elaboration. In other places, where intuition has failed us, the social sciences, and especially anthropology have come to the rescue.<sup>5</sup> There is no reason why they should not be of help here also.

Achebe does help us out with two clues. Firstly Okonkwo's is

not the first suicide by hanging in the book. At the beginning of his career, Okonkwo, who has been deprived of his birthright by an idle father, is forced to borrow seed-yams to start his farm. His endeavour is frustrated by perversities of the weather. We read 'That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself' (p. 22). The other clue is the Igbo reaction to suicide voiced by Obierika after his friend's death: 'It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen' (p. 186).

These two facts together tend to suggest that suicide, in itself disgraceful, is often a reaction to a different sort of disgrace. Thus the individual will only commit it should the social disgrace he suffers outweigh the ignominy of the act itself. If this is true and applicable to Okonkwo the question arises as to what form of disgrace he had experienced. It might be the anticipated disgrace of arrest. Arthur Ravenscroft, as we have seen, denies this, and with reason: Okonkwo has been arrested before, after the church-raiding incident, and his reaction then was defiant: 'Okonkwo was choked with hate' (p. 176). The only other possibility is that he feels the disgrace of the homicide he had just perpetrated against the Commissioner's messenger. This would be surprising, however, since it is in accordance with just the aggressive policy he has been advocating. To kill an enemy, furthermore, is not necessarily seen as culpable in Igbo society, though caution is sometimes advised. This, at least, is the strong impression left by the public reaction to the slaughter of a white stranger by the people of neighbouring Abame. 'Those men of Abame were fools' says Uchendu (p. 127), not 'those men were wrong'.

The explicitly shameful nature of suicide also rules out the possibility that Okonkwo killed himself in order to retain his integrity, after the Roman manner. No possible sort of honour could accrue from a course of action which would result in his being hurled into the bad bush to rot like his despised father Unoka.



Okonkwo is a man far too careful of social acceptance for that.

Some sort of explanation has to be sought elsewhere, and this is where I intend to flee for aid to the social scientists. Who better, in this instance, than Emile Durkheim, the father of sociology, who in his seminal study of suicide published in 1897<sup>6</sup> has left us an invaluable model by which to test our speculations. Durkheim divided suicides into three types, claiming that avowed or officially recorded motive was less significant than the social climate such deaths reflected. The first type, particularly characteristic of Protestant Europe, was egotistical suicide, caused by a diffused, tolerant society which allowed its citizens to wallow in purely private misery. The second, its polar opposite, was altruistic suicide caused by contempt for individual destiny and the desire to accord to the rigid moral code of a tightly organized culture. This he thought especially characteristic of non-European societies. The third, most complex, was anomic suicide, stimulated at periods of rapid change which caused the individual to lose his bearings. His evidence for this latter type was drawn principally from the economic disruptions experienced in various European countries in the 1870's and 80's. Durkheim further admitted that a combination of these different types was possible.

If we turn to view Okonkwo's suicide against this model the first thing we notice is that the type which Durkheim thought most characteristic of non-European societies is in fact the least applicable to his case. Igbo society in the book is described as being neither rigid nor especially cohesive. In it considerable prestige is given to personal merit, observable in terms of wealth, land, prowess, and eloquence. The clan or village group is governed, not by an exclusive hereditary elite, but by a council of able and responsive elders. It demonstrates in fact an extreme instance of what anthropologists term 'achieved status'. Individual life is much prized, except in instances of abhorrent disease or some other monstrosity, in which cases the victim is cast into the bad bush. Okonkwo himself has attained considerable recognition by his people for his perceived skills. His death certainly does not

correspond to any pre-conceived notion of honour, so that for all these reasons altruistic suicide is out of the question.

Durkheim thought egotistical suicide a distinctively European disease, but, since Igbo society is seen to be so loosely organized, such a classification is at least possible. When Okonkwo is obliged to leave Umuafia after killing a kinsman, and to withdraw to his mother's village, his reaction displays a certain amount of morbidity. But when he is reproofed for this by his uncle Unchendu, he soon recovers and settles down to establishing a new life with alacrity. His characteristic mode of expressing personal peak is usually seen to be aggressive action, as when he beats his younger wife Ojiugo during the week of peace (p. 27). His petulant defiance against the white man, which is unrelenting, and his final assassination of the messenger show that he is not the man to dwell uselessly on imagined slights or deprivation.

But Okonkwo has also been deprived of something more fundamental, not merely respect or freedom, but also his precious sense of himself. At the beginning of the book we can see how his personality has been formed in reaction to his father's. Unoka was weak, idle, artistically sensitive. Technically his character approximated to the female ethical principle, which although institutionalized in the form of Ani, the earth goddess, in practice tended to be despised. Okonkwo set a distance between it and himself by committing himself totally to the active pursuits of the tribe, and repressing his own tremulous responses. Consequently he is continually being reprimanded for offences against Ani, his exile being only the worst instance of this. In other respects his policy is an almost complete success: he takes all but the highest of the clan's titles. When the missionaries come they appeal to the thwarted lyrical impulses, the sense of loss or failure, the cry of the twins in the wilderness to which Nwoye, Okonkwo's eldest son, responds. As their influence spreads, the masculine assertive principle is undermined by that softer undertremor to which the people have paid all too little heed. Hence, challenged by the

authority of the stranger, they react by conciliation. Okonkwo, with his wilful allegiance to the assertive ideal, finds himself supplanted. Personal prowess, which had been for him the path to social acceptance, finally isolates him.

Ironically it is Unoka, who, earlier in the book, puts his finger on the aspect of his son's makeup which works his undoing. When the harvest fails, and the young Okonkwo's courage survives, we are told that 'He put it down to his inflexible will' (p. 23). But Unoka has a subtler interpretation: 'You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone' (p. 23). Okonkwo ultimately could take that failure because it marked him out as a farmer amongst others, a man among men. Later, after his banishment, his anguish is more severe, because, we read, 'His life had been ruled by a great passion – to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting' (p. 119). That, however, had been a merely circumstantial exclusion: he had understood and respected the reason for his exile. His final disgrace, however, is one which cannot be explained by the mores of the tribe as he perceives them. By all established criteria he should have been praised for his defiance, instead of which he is met with perplexity. After the decapitation incident, 'The waiting backcloth jumped into tumultuous life and the meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messenger escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discovered fright in that tumult'.

Igbo society has been plunged into anomy by the intervention of the British. In this new world of slipping realities the villagers have lost their bearings. Okonkwo, in some ways their most typical hero, is completely at a loss to explain the change. He experiences much the same sense of vertigo as Durkheim diagnosed

amongst the recently bereaved.<sup>7</sup> Durkheim had believed anomy to be a European phenomenon, because he thought of other societies as being fundamentally stable. He reckoned without the drastic upheaval of colonial interference. Okonkwo is, in one sense, a victim of colonialism, in another of himself. Caught between the two, he destroys himself through mere confusion.

## NOTES

1. All page references in this article are to the Heinemann Educational Books edition of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (first published 1958).
2. Gerald Moore, *Seven African Writers* (London, O.U.P., 1962) p. 64.
3. Arthur Ravenscroft, *Chinua Achebe* (British Council and Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1969) p. 18.
4. G. D. Killam, *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* (London, Heinemann, 1969) p. 31.
5. A considered account of the book which takes note of anthropological material may be found in Emmanuel Obiechina, *Cultural Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975).
6. Emile Durkheim, *Le Suicide, Etude de Sociologie*. The edition referred to here is that published by Librairie Félix Alcan of Paris, 1930.
7. Durkheim, *ibid.*, pp. 289-311.

# Nissim Ezekiel

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## FROM NUDES: A SEQUENCE OF 14 FREE-VERSE SONNETS

9.

Hills, valleys, swelling river-banks,  
all those landscape images;  
praise of breasts and buttocks  
seen as fruit, thighs as tree-trunks;  
flower, moon, fire, bird  
of desire, fish of sex  
remotely tell a small  
fragmented part of the story.

I see you here, stretched out,  
not as complex pulls and tensions,  
muscle, bone, skin, resilience  
but as person, always  
human in your naked  
unposed poses, resisting form.

10.

I like this little poem, she said,  
when did you write it?

My only haiku, that went:  
*Unasked, as the day  
declined, she brought out her small  
breasts, to be caressed.*  
I'm glad you like it,  
smiling weakly, intrigued.  
What exactly is a haiku?  
And when I told her,  
she repeated, I like it.  
*Unasked, as the day  
declined, she brought out her full  
breasts, to be caressed.*

YASMINE GOONERATNE

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## Ruth Jhabvala: Generating Heat and Light

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust* (John Murray, 1975, 181 pp., £3.95)

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories* (John Murray, 1976, 203 pp.)

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, whose Polish roots have penetrated deeply

into the Indian soil during the twenty-four years that she has lived and written in Delhi, works chiefly in two genres of fiction: novels and stories set in middle-class Delhi (or, more recently, Bombay) whose characters are chiefly Indian by birth, and whose themes centre upon the conflicts generated in every-day life by such Indian institutions as the joint-family system or the Indian version of such others as the commercial establishment or the bureaucracy; and others that focus on the experiences of foreigners visiting or living permanently in India. *How I Became a Holy Mother* includes examples of both genres, while *Heat and Dust* belongs to the second. The reader who is familiar with Mrs Jhabvala's earlier work will be aware of the immense advances she has made in her art of seemingly artless story-telling, with no sacrifice of subtlety or seriousness and a significant increase in the tolerance and understanding that has always accompanied even her most mordant satire.

For it was as a satirist with a sharp eye for hypocrisy and inconsistency in middle-class Indian life that Ruth Jhabvala first made her mark. As an expatriate writer determined to keep her moral and cultural balance she appears to have taken naturally to an ironic mode; first, of observing what was about her, and then, of expressing in art the essence of what she had observed. A habit of ironic under-cutting within a sentence in her early work led critics to link her with the youthful Jane Austen; for example, the following extract from *Get Ready For Battle*:

These being modern times, many people had brought their wives, who sat in a semi-circle at one end of the room and sipped pineapple juice.

As H. M. Williams has noted in his study of her work, *The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala*, such irony can become a most efficient satiric weapon:

Three groups are the targets of her most pungent revelations. There are the *nouveau riches* . . . corrupt and ruthless men. A second group is the wester-

nized young sophisticates who dance, drink and flirt in the clubs and restaurants of Delhi, expatiating at length on the necessity for modernization and socialism but doing exactly nothing about it . . . The third group excites Jhabvala's most acid treatment, the rich Indian woman who sets up as 'do-gooders'. With a total lack of charity and no interest in real people, they are Chairman of Boards, social reformers, politicians, presidents of cultural organizations.

To these three I would add a fourth and most important estate: the temporary visitors to India who fail to understand but seek to interpret her mysteries. The closing pages of *A Backward Place* contain, in one of the finest examples of sustained satiric writing in Mrs Jhabvala's early manner, a double-portrait of two prize specimens of such misplaced intellectualism – Dr Franz Hochstadt and his wife. Returning home from 'the world premiere of Ibsen's *Doll's House* in Hindi' (another neat splicing together of incompatibles in the Austen manner), Dr Hochstadt and his wife meditate on the event:

Here was a true attempt, on the one hand, to revive the theatre and rekindle in the people a love of that great art which they had lost but which had once, in ancient days, been so triumphantly theirs; and, on the other, to weld this ancient heritage to what had since been achieved in countries of the West and so bring about a synthesis not only of old and new but also – and what could be culturally more fertile? – of East and West . . .

As the familiar platitudes boom relentlessly on, the Hochstadts' habitual reliance on them reveals their own inadequacies. They are 'cultured', knowledgeable people who have conscientiously prepared themselves for India. They determinedly appreciate everything, see the best side of everything (even of the ludicrous and futile, of which the dramatic performance they have just been witnessing is a good example), categorise everything and everyone, and believe they know all the answers. They are unfailingly courteous, magnificently self-controlled – and yet, India eludes them. They have not the least affection for the place, or for a single person in it. At the novel's end they are 'not sorry' to leave



this 'fabled land', with which (as the reader is aware, although they are not) they have never really made contact.

In her most recent work, the foreign 'expert' on India makes his voice heard again, and receives Mrs Jhabvala's best ironic treatment. Major Minnies, the old Indian hand of *Heat and Dust*

had been in India for over twenty years and knew all there was to know about it; so did his wife.

He is but a minor character in the drama surrounding the elopement in the 1920's of an English civil servant's wife with an Indian prince, that forms the tale-within-a-tale recorded in her journal by the narrator of *Heat and Dust*. But his meditations (as published in a monograph) upon the recurring problem: how does a foreigner open himself to the Indian experience without sacrificing his individuality and the distinctive virtues of his own nature? are central to the novel and, indeed, to a good deal of Mrs Jhabvala's fiction. Her presentation of the Major leaves satire, amusing and justified though it is in her work, far behind. His meditations are treated with understanding, and although their value is undermined by Olivia Rivers' experience, in contrast with the opinions of another British official – Dr Saunders – they seem positively liberal:

India always, he said, finds out the weak spot and presses on it. Both Dr Saunders and Major Minnies spoke of the weak spot. But whereas for Dr Saunders it is something, or someone, rotten, for the Major this weak spot is to be found in the most sensitive, often the finest people – and moreover, in their finest feelings. It is there that India seeks them out and pulls them over into what the Major called the other dimension. He also referred to it as another element, one in which the European is not accustomed to live so that by immersion in it he becomes debilitated, or even (like Olivia) destroyed.

These are representative voices, and by their verdict Olivia Rivers is judged and condemned – as something rotten, as someone sen-

sitive but unguarded and weak. Theirs is not, however, the last word on the subject. It is given the lie by the young English narrator of the novel who believes – and her own experience as she deliberately follows in Olivia's footsteps seems to confirm – that India has inspired Olivia to discover in herself a new strength and health and spirit. An investigation into the circumstances surrounding Olivia's elopement with the Nawab turns into a pilgrimage, for it becomes evident to the narrator that Olivia has undergone some kind of spiritual rebirth that has led her to lasting contentment and peace:

To have done what she did – and then to have stuck to it all her life long – she couldn't have remained the same person she had been.

To find out what Olivia became, and if possible achieve a similar contentment, the narrator must 'go Olivia's way. The novel leaves her an altered person indeed, half-way up the mountain that was Olivia's last home, looking forward and upward to

mountain peaks higher than any I've ever dreamed of, the snow on them is also whiter than all other snow – so white it is luminous and shines against a sky which is of a deeper blue than any yet known to me. That is what I expect to see. Perhaps it is also what Olivia saw: the view – or vision – that filled her eyes all those years and suffused her soul.

In turning from social satire to the theme of spiritual hunger and psychological change, Ruth Jhabvala is not making a break with her literary past, but developing interests that were always present in her work while letting others – now, perhaps, worked on sufficiently in her opinion – go. Loneliness and isolation are recurrent themes in her fiction, and always have been though in earlier work they received comic treatment (one recalls *The Householder*, in which Prem – immature husband and ineffective teacher – sits alone and weeps for loneliness in one room of his tiny flat while his young wife Indu sits alone and weeps in the other) or co-existed with satire and social criticism: in *A Backward Place*, for instance,

Etta's loneliness and sense of alienation eat into her spirit until she attempts suicide, but the reader is not so much invited to pity her as to connect her disturbed state of mind with the inadequacy revealed by her dismissive view of India. In *Get Ready For Battle* Mrs Jhabvala's treatment of this theme took a new direction. Amid all the amusement generated by her ironic presentation of the business mogul, Gulzari Lal, and his kittenish mistress Kusum, one character stands out whose personal dilemma links her with the two 'heroines' of *Heat and Dust*, Sarla Devi's isolation is self-chosen, a luxury and a source of delight to her. She is driven neither by conscience nor by a love for humanity to give up her wealth, but by her fierce desire to be alone and uninvolved. Her occasional forays in support of one social cause or another are in the nature of penance for such self-indulgence; one day she hopes never to have to 'engage' herself in battle again. It is significant that the two most self-centred characters in the novel (her brother and her daughter-in-law) call Sarla Devi a 'mad woman'. Yet she alone knows what it is to be 'most intensely alive', and in contrast with her, nearly every other character in *Get Ready For Battle* lives a mere half-life of pettiness and spiritual limitation.

The themes of isolation and of the effects of isolation upon the human spirit that hungers for fulfilment are taken up again and again in both Mrs Jhabvala's new books, and looked at from different angles, but always with deep seriousness and concern. In *Heat and Dust* the enervating dust-storms of the plains and the consequent annual retreat from them by English families to the cooler hill-stations serve to detach certain characters from their customary Indian or British identification and re-group them according to their individual or secret desires. Olivia's friendship with the Nawab and his English companion Harry grows as a result of her isolation (the other wives have left for the hills, and her husband Douglas is stoically keeping office-hours in the sweltering summer heat). In her early days in India Olivia had barricaded herself in, 'alone in her big house with all the doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and the dust'. Meeting the

Nawab, she realises that she had been excluding life and freshness from her experience; and the idea that spiritual refreshment is to be found in personal relationships between 'special' people, kindred spirits who (as a faqir from Ajmere had once told the Nawab) have 'sat close to each other once in Paradise', is symbolised in a magical little spring of perennially cool water that flows in a green grove Olivia visits with the Nawab. The mere thought of the Nawab makes Olivia feel physically and mentally well –

entirely untroubled by the heat or the murky atmosphere. It was as if there were a little spring welling up inside her that kept her fresh and gay.

Such a symbolic use as this of a spring (or, in the passage already quoted, a mountain) illustrates the manner in which Mrs Jhabvala has retained and developed certain artistic devices she tried out in earlier writing. There, effects were occasionally too contrived sometimes, and her use of the symbolic possibilities of object, incident and setting somewhat strained; as in the following passage from *Get Ready For Battle* –

'I think we ought to concentrate more on our cottage industries', said Premola Singh, a very intelligent and well-educated girl (she had a higher degree in Home Science). 'I was reading such an interesting article the other day on village handicrafts'.

'Village fiddle-sticks', said Pitu. 'That's all sentimental rubbish'. He made a sound of disgust, waved his hand in the air and stumbled over a hand-loomed rug.

The mountain and the spring of *Heat and Dust* are as real as a hand-loomed rug, but their use as symbols of spiritual achievement and refreshment represents a significant advance on the technical virtues of the passage above, while still being of a piece with those parts of Mrs Jhabvala's early fiction in which landscape and sky, even when violated by ugliness and man's misuse, could hold possibilities and hope of regeneration; as in *A Backward Place*, where the sun setting on an abandoned slum colony created

a sky

blazing with the most splendid, the most royal of colours and everything – the old woman, the ashes, the rags, the broken bricks, the split old bicycle tyres – everything burst into glory.

A related use of landscape as a symbol of a fulfilling spiritual life occurs in two stories in *How I Became a Holy Mother*. 'In the Mountains' concerns the self-chosen isolation in a tiny mountain dwelling of a young woman from a conventional Indian middle-class home. Her relations who (according to her) spend their time 'eating and making money' regard her as eccentric, and believe her to be lonely. Like Olivia and Sarla Devi, she has her own pleasures. Her companion, a reject from 'respectable' Indian society, is a derelict philosopher who possesses no identifiable degree but is called 'Doctor Sahib' and is 'as nimble as herself' in clambering up and down the mountain upon which they choose to live. In contrast to them both, Bobby (an associate of an earlier, romantic period in her life) is 'in very poor condition', agility in mountain-climbing thus being made analogous with spiritual freedom. In the volume's title-story, on the other hand, may be found an ironic use of such symbolism: an ex-model from London who seeks a mountain refuge as do so many of Jhabvala's expatriate characters 'to find peace' finds instead that the ashram of her choice turns into a launching-pad for a new career as a female yogi or 'holy mother'. Appetisingly dressed and served up for western consumption, shuttled hurriedly from one western city to another, she looks longingly back between 'engagements' to the India she has left, and concludes her sad (and immensely funny) story with the words 'I seem to see those mountains and the river and temples; and then I long to be there'. Such use of a setting links Ruth Jhabvala with other Indian novelists such as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan who, though writing very different kinds of fiction, draw in particular ways upon India's distinctive landscape and topography for both symbolism and structure.

The most striking feature of *Heat and Dust* from a technical point of view is Mrs Jhabvala's use of a cutting and splicing technique developed (as she herself disclosed, in an interview with Anna Rutherford last year) in writing for the cinema. The story moves backwards and forwards in the telling, linking the 1920's with the present day and Olivia's experiences with the narrator's by using certain objects (an Italian angel in a British cemetery, the spring in the grove, the miniature paintings in the Palace at Satipur) or events (the Festival of the Husband's Wedding Day, an excursion and a picnic, the sickness of a friend, a pregnancy and its termination) as fixed points upon which parallels between characters and incidents in the two different eras can be established. The effect of this is to emphasise, but very delicately indeed, the novel's main theme: of human nature and the possibility of spiritual regeneration as constants unaffected by the flow of time and history. It is worth noting that Mrs Jhabvala used a related method in earlier work, but for the more limited purposes of satire. *Get Ready For Battle* provides a good illustration of disconnected conversation as Vishnu and Mala, making love, display their capacity to selfishly exploit one another:

Then he told her, briefly and in short disconnected sentences with his face still pressed into her, about Joginder and his factory at Chandnipat.

'Chandnipat', she said.

'It will be very dull and there will be nobody'.

But she was smiling. She thought of the three of them, he and she and Priti, in a dull place. There would be nowhere for him to go. . .

'And the house we shall live in will be nothing like this. No comforts, nothing'.

But she was hardly listening, thinking only of how completely she would possess him there.

The vicious little story 'The Aliens' (published in a collection titled *Like Birds Like Fishes*) was another early piece that most precisely exposed selfishness and self-interest through stop-and-start conversation; in this case, the setting is the dining room of an

Indian businessman's house as the family (complete with wife, mother, brother, English sister-in-law, and the lively children of the joint family with all their conflicting interests and desires) settles down to its ritual mid-day meal. *Heat and Dust* extends the method beyond conversations, cutting short and linking together incidents as well, and whole sections of writing. For example, immediately after the section describing the narrator's visit to a suttee shrine dating back to 1823 there follows Olivia's experience of the actual incident, and an illuminating sidelight on her relationship with her husband. As a conversation begun in the 70's leads back to another that took place in the Civil Lines at Satipur, and returns to the 70's, one is struck repeatedly by the suitability of the mode to cinematic presentation – and is thankful for the directness and economy that the technique encourages. Mrs Jhabvala takes the fullest advantage of these and other possibilities, revealing herself as not merely the most compelling Indian writer of her day, but potentially one of the great writers of our time.

'How, one wonders, do India's thin-skinned intellectuals react to Miss (sic) Jhabvala?' inquired Christopher Wordsworth in a recent review of *Heat and Dust*. The answer to that question is simple, but regrettable: her novels and stories, invariably first published abroad (she can have little reason to complain of the reception she has had from publishers and reviewers in Britain and America) and later reprinted in India, have never received there the serious critical attention they deserve. Although she has been writing fiction for over twenty years, Mrs Jhabvala's Polish-Jewish origins appear to make even the most objective among Indian critics and reviewers doubt the authenticity and worth of her view of Indian society. Her refusal to take up 'social' themes irritates some critics, her coolly ironic presentation of different aspects of that most sacred of Indian institutions, the joint or extended family, disturbs and outrages others. The elder statesman among Indian academics try to pretend that she does not exist, and either forget to include her novels in lists of texts for university study (it is perhaps of some significance that they are

taught as literature texts at Australia's Macquarie University and at other universities outside India, but neglected by India's academic establishment), or deliberately exclude her from published critical studies of Indian fiction as a foreigner who does not conveniently fit into the category of 'Indo-Anglian' or 'English Indian' writing. I have suggested elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that her fiction gets closer to the truth about India than many of her critics have perceived, or wished to perceive. The award to her in 1975 of the Booker Prize for *Heat and Dust* appears to have made her the target of resentment, rather than a subject for responsible assessment.

At the recent Commonwealth Literature Conference in Delhi (the city that is Mrs Jhabvala's Indian home, and which has provided the constant setting for her early work), the conference papers that considered her novels had little to say in their support and praise, and astonishingly little reference was made to her writing in a general way that was not frivolous or superficial. One point of view (expressed in a paper – and I trust I am quoting correctly, since my copy of it is still in transit between Delhi and Sydney) was that Mrs Jhabvala's work has developed a superficiality and flippancy that disappoint the reader of her early novels: major issues seem to have been neglected for minor and more limited concerns. Another and more extreme criticism was that Ruth Jhabvala seems incapable of drawing Indian characters who are not comic, stupid or self-seeking; the mere idea that anything valuable could be learned about India from the fictions of an European expatriate – and one, moreover, who had chosen in recent years to isolate herself more and more from Indian social life – was found ludicrous. It appears that there is a blind spot in even the best Indian criticism when Ruth Jhabvala's work is under consideration. Nor is this really surprising; India has for so long been a focal point for western fantasising (Scott and Moore began the habit, and there was no lack of novelists and minor poets to carry it on) that her critics can scarcely be blamed for reacting with some impatience and hostility to what they doubtless see as a new and impertinent invasion of the dignity of their



society. And since Mrs Jhabvala writes from within India, her opinions cannot be dismissed as an outsider's unresearched or ignorant impressions. The sympathy with which she invariably strives to present a picture as a whole and not merely in part is brushed aside, and the irony with which she highlights particular features of that picture is regarded as irresponsible, disloyal, and even a shade traitorous.

But the failure to grant Mrs Jhabvala a just and responsible assessment is not, one should note, an Indian failure only. A British academic's reference some years ago to what he termed the 'pedestrian' quality of her prose should rank high in collections of critical statements their authors fervently wish had never been uttered. Only slightly less unfortunate, in the context of the artistic achievement of *Heat and Dust*, was another British complaint (made at the Delhi conference) that the novel seemed to suffer from a faded quality resembling the sepia portraits of the 1920's as they appear to us today! Mrs Jhabvala's inclination towards understatement and the use of ten words where other writers might use a hundred certainly do not help careless readers to appreciate her art. But for those who do pay her the compliment of careful reading, there has always been a special delight in her management of a narrative voice that slips slyly in and out of a character's thoughts: for instance in *The Householder* we have this –

Prem frowned, for he did not like girls to be indelicate. They should be remote and soulful; *like Goddesses they should be.*

or

Soon he would have a family and his expenses would mount; but his salary at Mr Khanna's college was only 175 rupees a month. *How to manage on that?* (My italics)

Such passages could appear 'pedestrian' to a reader unprepared to adjust his expectations to accommodate a writer who is honest

rather than consciously literary; or to one unaware of the rich variety of English speech that is to be found in India. And on the latter count who, after reading Nissim Ezekiel or hearing Peter Sellers, can claim such ignorance? In *Heat and Dust* Mrs Jhabvala's talent for capturing the comic or endearing aspects of Indian English in the speech or thoughts of her characters is, however, subordinated to the novel's more important interests. 'You'll really do this for me? How brave you are!' cries Douglas Rivers, when Olivia tells him of her pregnancy. Both Rivers and the Nawab are presented in the novel as men of character, who recall a heroic ancestry with pride, and love and appreciate Olivia very much although in different ways. In their respective reaction to Olivia's announcement, it is an identity of feeling that catches the reader's attention: for the Nawab's response is identical in spirit to Douglas's although the words and word-order are, as is to be expected, rather different – 'Really you will do this for me?' says the Nawab to Olivia. 'Oh how brave you are!' The extreme delicacy and unobtrusiveness with which the necessary distinction between English and Indian speech has been made indicates that the interest of the passage lies elsewhere than in a comic comparison of 'pukka sahib' speech with a Peter Sellers characterisation – and Mrs Jhabvala's precise and gentle art points her reader in the right direction.

For Ruth Jhabvala's fiction is as much about universal human experience as it is 'about' India, or 'about' an Englishwoman's scandalous indiscretion. Her characters travel towards a better knowledge of the mind and the heart, although they journey through an Indian landscape, though ashrams and holy mountains are to be met with on the way, and though her Vanity Fair is recognisably the city of Delhi. 'India always changes people, and I have been no exception', states the narrator of *Heat and Dust*, thereby initiating the most deep-reading and moving study to date of a theme that has been at the heart of every one of this author's novels and stories that takes up the subject of individuals uprooted from one society and planted in another. For those who

have read Jhabvala over the years of her remarkably rapid and continuous development, it is hard to avoid a growing conviction that in her exploration of such characters the author is externalising through fiction certain aspects, painful, exhilarating, or puzzling, of her own relationship with the country of her adoption. Judy in *A Backward Place* was, like Sudhir Bannerjee, one of those who accepted India

and rejoiced in it and gave (herself) over to it, the way a lover might.

Major Minnies in *Heat and Dust* regards India as

an opponent, even sometimes an enemy, to be guarded and if necessary fought against from without and, especially, from within: from within one's own being.

Between these extremes there exist innumerable attitudes, and Ruth Jhabvala explores a good many in her fiction having, doubtless, experienced them all at first or at second hand during her years in India. She avoids romanticising or sentimentalising her subject; indeed, the matter-of-fact sparseness of her style is the outward manifestation of a determined honesty. She does not strive to give the foreign reader glimpses of exotic interiors and quaint rural customs, nor does she plunge him in a philosophic mist; but India loses none of its mystery in her analysis. Rather there emerges from Mrs Jhabvala's fiction a sense of an ancient, settled society that is itself unchanging or changing very slowly, possessed of the power to alter permanently for good or evil and direct towards joy or misery the personalities of those who come into close contact with it.

It is to be hoped that the present atmosphere of dislike and deliberate or unconscious undervaluation in which Mrs Jhabvala's writing is received in India will soon change for the better. By turning from satire to deeper and more personal themes, and by showing that she possesses and has developed the technical

skill to do such themes justice, she fills the reader with expectation and hope for the future. She is not the first, nor will she be the last, writer for whom India has provided inspiration, experience, and a starting-point; for perhaps her 'Indian' novel will, in the final count, represent merely a milestone along her path to the greatness for which she has the potential, and on which one can only hope that time and strength will allow her to journey without interruption. To turn the personal into the impersonal, the immediate into the universal, and the ephemeral into the permanent – as she does – take courage and artistic self-discipline of a rare kind. These two new books confirm the first and develop the second in writing that will be, for me, a source of lasting admiration and pleasure.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. "Traditional" Elements in the Fiction of Markandaya, Narayan and Jhabvala'. In *World Literature Written in English*, XV, 1 (April 1976), pp. 121-34.

# Dorothy Livesay

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## INTERVIEW

In March 1978 Dorothy Livesay visited the University of Aarhus, Denmark. She had been invited to lecture on 'Canadian Political Writing in the 30s' and discuss her latest book *Right Hand, Left Hand*. In the middle of a successful and busy stay Dorothy Livesay found time to answer several questions in connection with Canadian nationalism. The interviewer is Jørn Carlsen who teaches Canadian literature at Aarhus University.

*The question of national identity seems a very dominant one in modern Canadian literature and criticism. Would you like to comment on this?*

To speak of Canadian nationalism and the search for Canadian identity as a modern phenomenon is utter nonsense. The search for assertion of a Canadian identity goes back one hundred years. I should perhaps stress that I am talking about English speaking Canada – the Quebec problem is still a very separate one.

In English Canada in the 1880s there was a very strong movement to join with the United States. This led to a reaction on the part of writers and thinkers and men of education and a whole movement of 'Canada First' was started. One of the chief supporters of this movement was one of our leading poets, Charles G. Roberts who was a young man at the time. He edited a paper in Toronto called *The Week* and its policy was to work for a Canadian identity, rejecting the idea of being a colony of either England or the United States. That movement I suppose petered out so that during the first years of the twentieth century there was a lull. Of course those were the years of tremendous immigration

from Europe. We were so busy during that period grabbing land and building on it that the original Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities in the cities did not have time perhaps to think of the nation as a whole.

But then came World War I. And this stirred tremendous waves of patriotism. My father was a war correspondent in France. When he came back he wrote a book called *Canada's Hundred Days* which was an account of the Canadian's role in the battle of the Somme. It was in that atmosphere of great national fervour that I grew up.

At the same time my mother was very concerned with Canadian literature so that by the 1920s, by 1920 actually, there was such an interest in building up our own culture and literature that the Canadian Authors' Association was formed with Sir Charles G. E. Roberts as first president.

From then on all through that decade there was a great concentration on Canadian literature. Carmen and Roberts, the major poets of the time, toured up and down the country reading their poetry. And if you take the trouble to look you would find that the list of anthologies and books of poetry that appeared in that period is quite staggering.

You can say that I grew up in what you may call the 'maple leaf period' of our quest for identity. I was a cub reporter during one of my university summers for the *Winnipeg Tribune*. I had to cover a meeting where there was a British Imperialist who roared and shouted about the wonders of the British Empire. At the end of the evening he pulled out a Union Jack, wrapped it around himself and said 'Shoot who dare'. This so horrified me that I wrote to my parents and told them that from then on I would have nothing more to do with the Empire, that what I believed in was Canada. And so I did until the depression and then the whole picture changed.

What happened then, to my generation of university students in the thirties, was I think fairly common. We had been studying either at home or abroad and on the completion of our degrees we

found there was no work for anyone. I had wanted to be a lecturer in modern languages because that was the field in which I had specialized but there were no jobs to be had, either in the university or anywhere else. We became aware of the fact that unemployment was a problem not only in Canada or America where the banks were all failing but in Europe as well, in France for instance where the economic situation was deplorable. What was worse, the governments seemed to have no solution except to bring out the police whenever there was a demonstration.

And so we became politicized. We read Marx and Lenin, attended meetings of the Socialist party or Communist party and forgot all about the problem of nationalism and building up of our own culture. We were concerned with the world problem of unemployment, with the beginnings of fascism, the march of Hitler's youth groups, Mussolini's program for advancement through war. Our fight was for peace against war and fascism, we hoped to change the world into a more democratic and socialist society. Our thoughts were in terms of the world situation, not the nationalist movement.

*Could you tell us when you again became involved in the question of national identity.*

The Left I was associated with up till 1935 was very sectarian and solely concerned with the working class and its taking control. But the Comintern of 1935 came forward with the slogans of a popular front, with the idea that only by linking the working class with the progressive middle class would the change-over take place and Hitler be stopped. This gave an entirely new direction again to the work we were doing. Writing and pamphleteering and appearing on the picket line and being activist in these various ways, we were not told that we must reach the middle class. And so we began again. It was mainly done by means of conferences against war. I was in charge of the first peace conference of young people which took place in Montreal in 1934-1935. We contacted middle

class groups like YWCA's, church groups, and so on and got a conference going. This was followed by a major conference and after that several others were held round the world.

The one in Paris was very important. The slogan was 'there will be a mass massacre unless we can stop war and rally people now'. Well, of course the war started in Spain, and again this rallied us all to try and defend Spanish democracy. But the interesting thing about the articles I have looked at in *New Frontier* of that period, is that though we were very concerned with Spain and with world affairs we were also writing articles about Canadian literature and about Canadian culture and about our need to be a nation and speak out as a nation, so you will find these articles about Canadian literature and our national identity appearing in *New Frontier* and presumably also in *The Canadian Forum* at the same time.

So that was the way it came back again and of course after the defeat of Spain and the Soviet-German pact in 1939 our international hopes were completely dashed.

When Hitler attacked Europe the decision was made to send Canadians abroad, and this rallied all the Canadian feeling again. I've written a poem about the resurgence of national feeling during the early years of the war, it's called 'West Coast' and it's about the thousands of people that came to the West coast to work in the shipyards. For the first time we had a mass intermingling of people from all parts of Canada which had never happened before on this scale. The other think that happened was that the soldiers who enlisted were sent to camps right across Canada and they for the first time in their life travelled and saw the country. So the war, however terrible it was, did an amazing thing for the Canadian identity. It really made us to get to know each other and those were good years in that respect because there was a positive feeling about the country.

So we were full of hope when the war was over and our soldiers returned from overseas. We thought that they had learnt their lesson about unemployment and fascism and that the young people would be ready to settle down and change society. But as I



said in my lecture today [14 March 1978, Aarhus, Denmark] and in my book, *Right Hand, Left Hand*, instead of a new society we got Hiroshima and the threat of the bomb. These events utterly discouraged us, so the later 40s and early 50s were times of great mental depression. The advent of the Korean War was another awful blow. However we made efforts from then on to build up the Canadian identity which has been written about by so many people. The Canada Council was formed, and George Woodcock started his magazine *Canadian Literature*. One could say that the basis was laid for the expansion of a national literature and for the creation of a Canadian consciousness. The tremendous progress that has been made over the past two decades owes much to those early efforts.

## FINALE

High on our hill we watched, and saw  
morning become high noon, and the tide full.  
Saw children chequered on the western beach  
and ferry boats plough back and forth, knocking the nose  
of tugboats, barges, freighters, convoys, cruisers:  
the harbour a great world of moving men  
geared to their own salvation, taking heart.  
We watched gold sun wheel past the sombre park  
slip beyond Lion's Gate, illuminate  
cool purple skyline of the Island hills.  
Then to the hulls and houses silence came  
blinds down on tired eyes  
dark drew its blanket over trees and streets  
grey granaries and harbour lights; muffled the mountain-side.  
Yet still, far, far below those lights pierced sky  
and water; blue and violet, quick magenta flash  
from welder's torch; and still the foreshore roared

strumming the sea, drumming its rhythm hard  
beating out strong against the ocean's song:  
the graveyard shift still hammering its way  
towards an unknown world, straddling new day.

'Finale' from *West Coast* is reproduced with kind permission of Dorothy Livesay.



*Dorothy Livesay.*

# Book Reviews

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W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact 1869-1971*. Oxford University Press, 1977. 556 pages. £17.50.

*The Commonwealth of Nations* is the ninth volume in the ten volume series *Europe and The World in The Age of Expansion* (ed. Boyd C. Shaler, University of Arizona). The early volumes cover the European exploration and territorial expansion, the later ones cover the introduction of European values, practices and ideas, the growing European involvement overseas and the emergence of new nations and states in America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

In this volume Professor W. David McIntyre, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, presents a comprehensive survey of the British Empire from 1869 to 1971 and its transformation into the Commonwealth of Nations; an evolution of relationships from subordination to equality, from sovereignty or protection to free association.

Apart from sheer size it is this gradual political transformation that makes the British Empire unique in colonial history, and it seems reasonable that the author of this one-volume work has chosen to emphasize the political rather than the cultural or economic aspects of Commonwealth history. While the cultural impact may prove the most lasting it is for the time being partly outside the historian's domain. The economic impact is no doubt the most problematic, but also the most incalculable to-day. About the nature of Commonwealth history the author states in the introduction, that 'its central theme concerns the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth'.

The author has divided the subject into three periods: 1869-1917, 1918-1941 and 1942-1971 (Britain's entry into the European Community). The years 1917 and 1941 are taken as watersheds because the entry of the United States into the two world wars proved essential to the survival of Britain and much of the Commonwealth. Within each of the periods - in fact the rise, decline and fall of the Empire - a four-fold thematic division is used: 1) Dominions, 2) Indian Empire, 3) Crown colonies and protectorates and 4) the various keynotes of the periods: first the quest for expansion and imperial unity, then the growing economic insecurity and political unrest of the interwar years and the rapid decolonization of the final years.

The framework for the treatment of this enormous subject is well conceived. But the choice of the year 1869 as a starting point may seem a little haphazard.

In the first part of the nineteenth century British colonial rule began to assume two distinct forms. There was a representative type in which local assemblies were entrusted with local legislation under official executive control, – the 'Greek' type of colony. And there was a 'Roman' type, the new and authoritative system of Crown Colonies with legislative and executive authority concentrated in the person of the governor. In the 'Greek' type white settlers dominated in a sparsely populated or 'empty' land.

The acceptance in London of Lord Durham's recommendations of responsible self-government in Canada in 1840 marked the beginning of the concept of Dominion and the growth of the idea of a Commonwealth. As Reginald Coupland has written, The Durham Report made it possible 'for the second British Colonial Empire to escape the fate of the first and so convert itself in course of time into a community of free people'. In this connection the dividing year would be somewhat earlier than 1869, before which this movement into self-government was in progress in colonies in Australia and New Zealand and had reached a climax with the constitution of the Dominion of Canada in 1867.

'In 1869 the British Empire was beginning to adopt that defensive stance which contemporaries called imperialism', writes McIntyre. Others have argued, that the defensive/aggressive attitude was of little importance until it convincingly reached Government level, which did not happen until at least a decade later. Even if Disraeli changed the political tempo of Britain in its foreign dealings he was hardly a genuine imperialist. Wasn't the opening of the Suez Canal (not mentioned) in 1869 a more important event than the colonial discussions in Britain during that year?

McIntyre views the Commonwealth as largely a by-product of the decline of British power. Unlike the marxist interpreters of imperialism he sees the climax of Victorian imperialism as a function of fear rather than confidence and greed. This was the point of view held by an independent observer in the 1920's, the Danish professor C. A. Bodelsen in his book *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (reprinted 1960). It was adopted in the 1960's by Robinson and Gallagher in their book *Africa and the Victorians*, which caused an interesting debate among historians.

In the economic field McIntyre leans on E. J. Hobsbawm's book *Industry and Empire* (1969). In the 1880's it was evident that the United States and Germany were surpassing Britain in many branches of manufacturing. Hobsbawm explains the territorial expansion in terms of the economic decline. Foreign competition became so intense that Britain made a 'flight into her dependencies', making a 'retreat into her satellite world of formal and informal colonies'. Territorial expansion became a further source of weakness, it forced Britain to

deploy its strength over a still greater area. As another writer has put it 'The Empire, in fact, died as it grew'.

These points of view which continue to give ample material for theorizing and debate, have only been lightly touched upon by McIntyre. There are of course statistics indicating exploitation but he concentrates mainly on the political relationships. Here is a good deal of tangible evidence of the ways in which Britain liquidated its empire. Already in 1905 Richard Jebb proposed that the relation between Britain and the Dominions might more appropriately be called an alliance. The term did not catch because of the growing popularity of 'commonwealth', but as McIntyre adds 'in many ways it was an apt label'. After the Westminster Statute of 1931 the Dominions became full sovereign states, and it became the goal of the Crown Colonies to obtain Dominion status. After 1945 the importance of imperial defence co-operation dwindled gradually. The dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand entered into regional security pacts under American leadership.

In his versatile, varied and often detailed description of the long process of governing and the slow liquidation of the Empire, the author demonstrates the adaptability of the British colonial system, but also its inconsistencies and 'muddling through' policies. Sometimes, however, he seems a little too cautious or formalistic, for instance by distinguishing rather sharply between dominion status and other forms of self-government.

He does not seem to attach special importance to the example set by Ceylon, the first Crown Colony with a coloured population to obtain full internal self-government. Other writers have emphasized the importance of the Donoughmore Commission, comparing it to the Dürham Report; but, of course, Ceylon did not become a Dominion straight away.

Likewise in Southern Africa McIntyre distinguishes sharply between The Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, the former being a Dominion, the second not. He describes rather briefly the granting of the most fatal of colonial constitutions to South Africa in 1909, which did not give any political rights or even protection to the black majority. He continues, 'The Union of South Africa Act of 1909 was, however, the last occasion when the British delivered a majority population to the mercies of a white minority'.

This is either far too formalistic or simply false. Southern Rhodesia became a Dominion in 1923 in everything but name. The governor of this 'Crown Colony' was only a figurehead. The small white minority (1 white to 25 Africans) obtained authority over their own affairs and absolute control over one million Africans. No terms were imposed by Britain to broaden the franchise or admit Africans to the all-white parliament, and perhaps more significant is the fact that Rhodesia took part in all Dominion Commonwealth conferences from 1926 to 1964.

McIntyre mentions most of these facts, although still in a rather formalistic way, but later on he repeats his statement about South Africa being the last place where an indigenous majority were handed over to a settler minority. It has been proved to-day beyond doubt that Rhodesia and South Africa are the main examples of the consequences of a mistaken colonial policy. The author neither mentions the names of the British governments involved nor does he explain their responsibility for the South African constitution (Asquith) or for the development in Rhodesia, which ended in a deadlock with Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. On the other hand the book objectively analyzes the motives behind the Wilson government's equivocal attitude towards Ian Smith in the 1960's.

There are some gaps in the book, but it must be kept in mind, that McIntyre has not tried to write what he calls 'a compendium of 32 histories', although some of the chapters may be regarded as such. They increase the book's value as a reference book.

On the whole McIntyre has avoided the temptation to write an encyclopedic dull one-volume work on this enormous subject. Most of the book and especially the main chapters on changing keynotes are written with the scope and objectivity of the true historian. New views and studies are included and there is an abundance of well-chosen quotations, and also some exciting, funny or revealing anecdotes. Although lacking in tables showing, for instance, which territories constituted the colonial empire at various times, their population etc., the book has maps, notes, excellent bibliographical notes and an index. Although the book is up-to-date and useful in many ways, it seems too traditional and covers too little of the economic issues to amount to a real 'reappraisal' of its subject – as ambitiously claimed on the back cover.

To non-historians and especially to the minority who remember the inter-war years this book with its many data on the dramatic development within the Commonwealth during the last decades may well constitute a reappraisal. Much has changed since the days of the many outstanding personalities we meet in the book: Frederick Lugard, Joseph Chamberlain, Mohandas Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Kwame Nkrumah and many others. About 1971 the British dismantled the Sterling Area, withdrew forces from east of the Suez, joined the EEC and restricted Commonwealth immigration. The mother country was again 'little England'; the Commonwealth had become a forum for consultations of heads of government and for technical and cultural co-operation in over two hundred Commonwealth organizations.

SVEN POULSEN

Christine Pagnouille: *Malcolm Lowry. Voyage au fond de nos abîmes*. Lausanne, Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1977.

Christine Pagnouille belongs to the category of 'creative' literary critics. She has the sensibility of a poet, the elegant style of a true writer; she also has the modesty of those who can recognize a masterpiece and make themselves small in its shade.

Her title *Malcolm Lowry. Voyage au fond de nos abîmes* may be slightly misleading since the study does not deal with the whole of Lowry's œuvre but almost exclusively with *Under the Volcano*. The only other work discussed is the collection of short stories *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* examined in her first two chapters with special emphasis on 'Through the Panama' in the second. The author's intention is mainly to contrast the characters of these stories – who all choose the way up, with the Consul in *Under the Volcano* who deliberately chooses the way down. Interesting though they are, these two chapters slightly mar the unity of the book. But after all one shouldn't complain of getting more for the same price!

The analysis of *Under the Volcano* is a model of close reading at its best. Christine Pagnouille discusses the novel chapter by chapter in twelve sections of her study. She examines the variations of point of view and narrative method, drawing attention to the influence of painting, film or music on Lowry's technique, noting for instance the syncopated construction of a chapter in which Hugh, a former jazz guitarist, is the central consciousness, or contrasting the realism of the parts devoted to Hugh or Laruelle with the hallucinatory character of those centred on the Consul. She underlines the interdependence of everything, the recurrence of motifs and images which she traces through the different chapters, leaving out all that is not strictly relevant to the general meaning – a selection for which we should be grateful for her book never ceases to be pleasant to read.

In her last chapter Christine Pagnouille gathers all these threads together and endeavours to reach a conclusion. She shows that if *Under the Volcano* is a convincing enough love story almost in the realistic tradition it is also a condemnation of the modern world. These two strands of meaning, subtly interwoven throughout, coalesce into the garden metaphor which Lowry takes up a last time at the very end: the garden of love is also the earth, man's possession, perverted and threatened by his hankering after power. In a world where all values are upside down the hero's quest can only end, like the life of a dead dog (a linguistic inversion of god) at the bottom of the barranca. We may perhaps see a possibility of redemption in the ambiguous ending and an intimation that all the polarities of life can only be transcended beyond total regression. But

like Lowry himself the critic leaves this question open.

We feel throughout that Christine Pagnouille is knowledgeable not only about Lowry's writings but also about the history of Mexico, the secrets of the Tarot or Cabala, the myths of Faust and Prometheus, the Jungian archetypes. Yet she never flaunts this knowledge as is too often the case with well-equipped critics. She sheds her light on the novel in the most unassuming way so that it shines, undistorted, in the foreground. She refuses to fix or reduce it in any way, aware as she is that 'le Volcan ne peut se mettre en équations' (p. 128). Her lucid analysis preserves the rich aura of connotations, the multilayered significance of Lowry's masterpiece.

Christine Pagnouille has gone through *Under the Volcano* as one goes through *Ulysses* or *The Divine Comedy* and she invites us to do the same, mapping out the field to help us find our bearings. She considers that as a critic she can only escort us to the path that we must ultimately travel alone. That is why *Voyage au fond de nos abîmes* encourages us to re-read Lowry's novel and embark on the voyage for ourselves. What it offers is not just the interpretation of an intelligent and sensitive guide but the possibility of a personal experience 'dans le corps à corps d'une lecture solitaire' (p. 12).

JEANNE DELBAERE-GARANT

Stefan Makowiecki, *Malcolm Lowry and the lyrical convention of Fiction*. Uniwersytet A. Mickiewicza, seria Filologia Angielska Nr 8, Poznań, 1977. 84 pages. zł 32.

This essay by Stefan Makowiecki sanctions the long-standing belonging of the young Polish researcher and lecturer to 'cette étrange confrérie: celle des amis d'*Au-dessous du volcan*' (Maurice Nadeau). The fact that the study is based on a Ph. D. dissertation may account for a somewhat stilted style in some passages; it also accounts for perplexing cross-references to sometimes non-existent pages: Stefan Makowiecki was in Florida on a research scholarship at the time when his study was being printed and had thus no chance of checking the proofs.

A thorough reassessment of Malcolm Lowry's narrative work, mainly of *Under the Volcano*, is attempted in this essay in the light of the 'literary convention' provided by 'Ralph Freedman's study of the lyrical tradition in European literature'. In most respects this critical framework proves helpful in the consideration of Malcolm Lowry's novels. It accounts for some features that are often branded as weaknesses, such as poor character-drawing or the subjective



and markedly autobiographical trend of the writing.

There are points, however, where I find Stefan Makowiecki's insistence on the relevance of Freedman's categories slightly questionable. We shouldn't, for instance, overemphasize the solipsism of the protagonists: *Lazar Caustic* brilliantly anticipates what was to be known as anti-psychiatry; it is when Geoffrey finally breaks out of the 'prison of self' and takes in the 'external world' that he reaches his truly mythical dimension. We shouldn't ignore either the subtlety with which chronology is handled in *Under the Volans*. It is partly true that there are several encroachments on a strictly linear time. Yet, although there are indeed 'sudden [shifts] in time and place without any marked signals in the narrative', and although past episodes are either systematically recalled (by Hugh and Yvonne) or haunting the present (of Geoffrey), the irreversible progression in time from seven in the morning to seven at night is most carefully plotted.

These few reservations should not obscure the obvious merits of this essay, which testifies to its author's intimate knowledge of the works examined. Stefan Makowiecki is to my knowledge the first critic in English who has stressed with such clarity the function of the ambivalence in the recurring images that underlie *Under the Volans*, showing how it illustrates 'the central paradox' of the novel, namely that we are invited to see in the Consul 'a man who [is] the very shape and motion of the world's doom . . . but at the same time the living prophecy of its hope!' (*Mafalahe Lowry*, quoted on p. 53). He makes some excellent comments on the use of language, as when he points out that the language used to render Geoffrey's hallucination is in no way 'meant to reproduce the inner texture of the Consul's consciousness', but through its very coherence invites the reader to 'probe deeper'. It was important too that a critic should state clearly the relevance of Lowry's novel to our predicament: that what matters in a work of art is not some abstract formal perfection, but the meaning it gives to our condition through shaping our experience and, in this case, through disclosing a view of the world that is beyond our ordinary perception.

CHRISTINE PAGNOULLE

Chris Tiffin ed., *South Pacific Images*. South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, 1978. Aust \$6 to members of SPACLALS; Aust \$7.50 to non-members. Available from the editor, English Department, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 4067 Q. Australia.

*South Pacific Images* contains sixteen of the papers originally presented at the inaugural conference of SPACLALS in Brisbane in May 1977. It is notably the first volume to group together critical responses to all of the literatures of the South Pacific, an area not commonly seen as one sharing important aspects of the literary experience. With five select reading lists appended, the volume provides an extremely useful conspectus of South Pacific Literature. Chris Tiffin's 'Introduction' discusses the interrelationships between cultural stereotypes and literary images and argues that the formation of national self-images is one of the common features which unites the literatures of Fiji and Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, Papua New Guinea and the New Hebrides. His essay is an excellent guide to early developments on a new literary field and to critical issues.

A number of the papers confront the problem of colonialism as it manifests itself in these literatures. Nigel Krauth exposes white colonialist attitudes in expatriate writing about New Guinea. Michael Cotter relates Patrick White's most recent novel *A Fringe of Leaves* to aspects of Australia's colonial past in a particularly illuminating way. John Docker's essay discusses the neo-colonialist assumptions which (almost inevitably) lie at the basis of our teaching of English literature. He points out that the unquestioning Anglocentricity of English Departments has produced an insidious post-colonial provinciality which should be challenged.

One of the most interesting essays – Vijay Mishra's paper on 'Indo-Fijian and the Glimpse Ideology' – traces the image of the indentured Indian labourer in Indo-Fijian literature and formulates a model of Fijian literary history which is an exciting pioneering achievement. This article is complemented by Subramani's 'Images of Fiji in Literature' which takes a view of Fijian literary development. It discusses the particular multicultural context of Fiji and speculates about the predominance of Indians among Fiji's writers. He goes on to provide an introductory survey of contemporary Fijian poetry. Kirpal Singh and Harry Aveling each suggest preliminary versions of a canon of Singaporean literature, though their essays lack the theoretical basis which is such an impressive feature of Mishra's. The opening paper in the volume, Sasendra Nandan's 'Beyond Colonialism: The Artist as Healer' is a wide-ranging essay urging the importance of the metaphysical role of the artist in a colonial society. He discusses the images of the artist presented by Naipaul, Soyinka, and White and argues that in the progress from history to myth to the realm of the aesthetic imagination is imagined the synthesizing and 'healing' power of the artist in a colonial environment. Bruce Bennett's essay directs attention to the range of Australian responses to Asian culture and discusses in particular those depicted by Hal Porter and Randolph Stow. One heritage of the colonial era has been the challenge of multiculturalism and Lolo Houbein writes about an

unjustifiably neglected aspect of modern Australian literature. We have learnt to assess the responses of transported nineteenth-century English people to Australia, Ms Houbain shows how extensive and important is the work of the newer exiles, the non-English immigrants.

Tom Shapcott extends the familiar notion of 'The voyager tradition' in Australian poetry, showing it to be a continuing preoccupation among contemporary writers. He contends that it is still a potent vehicle for mythologizing the national and local sense of place. A complex essay on Gwen Harwood and John Shaw Nielson by Norman Talbot highlights hitherto unacknowledged similarities in the ways in which these two major poets have accommodated Australian ecological vision in their images of the artist.

In all of these papers there is a shared acknowledgement of the centrality of the artist, a crucial concern with defining and refining national self-images, and the recognition of the importance of adopting an accurate perspective from which to view national literatures. Those concerns make this an unusually unified volume of conference papers and they contribute to its considerable value as an introduction to the old and the new literatures of the South Pacific.

ALAN LAWSON

Patricia Grace, *Mutuwhenua: The Moon Sleeps*. Longman Paul, 1978. csd. \$7.95. pa. \$4.95.

'Stainless and shining, and as pure as the night of Mutuwhenua when the moon goes underground and sleeps' So Patricia Grace describes the heroine of her second book and first novel, successor to her stories, *Wairiki* (1975). It seems the brief and simple tale, told with very considerable integrity, economy, precision, of a young Maori girl, only daughter, growing up in a Maori rural neighbourhood, say, somewhere on the west coast north of Wellington. Increasingly she becomes aware both of her own world and of distinction between it and that of the pakeha, yet she marries a pakeha teacher, Graeme, and, with him in the city, comes to an almost destructive realisation that if she is to be true to herself she can never belong to the pakeha world.

'Mutuwhenua' is that phase when the moon is not seen – but it is there, even buried in darkness like 'her' ancient mere, discovered, then bulldozed deeply over in a gully (out of pakeha reach) in chapter two. 'The stone was my inheritance. It would always be so, but [my father] wanted me to have another inheritance as well'. So the stubborn father accepts, welcomes, her pakeha marriage. Yet at the end of the book, after her psychological crisis in the city,

then her father's death at the time of her son's birth, she rejoins Graeme in the city, leaving their child with her family, and the final sentence of the book reads: 'I went, remembering that day of Rakaunui, the time when you can see the shape of the tree that Rona clutched as the moon drew her to the skies'. Rakaunui, full moon, is when the rakau, Rona's ngaio tree, can be seen plainly in the moon. Rona, going to the spring, cursed the obscured moon when she tripped. Patricia Grace's Ripeka (also Ngaio – 'her' tree at home – and, temporarily, pakehified Linda) remembers Dad's repeated words, 'you'll do right when the right time comes', and when that crisis comes upon her in the pakeha city, responds and recognises the ineluctable stone within. Unlike Rona's denial, she asks and accepts the gathered wisdom of her kin, and is neither drawn out of this world nor alienated as is Chieka in *Owls Do Cry* from her soul's dark yet luminous inheritance.

The division of Ripeka's world begins with the shock of menstruation, a two-fold division both into pakeha/Maori and into things seen/unseen. This latter theme develops subtly, first the mere, then careless impiety – and reactions and consequences – gathering seafood at Rakaunui, then awareness of Grandpa Toki's ghostly presence at his death (in a narrative context of Mutuwhenua), and then her major urban crisis, pregnant, far from her people. In the unfamiliar house she experiences increasingly strange nights – 'The dreams had in them a tall woman with moko on her chin a woman I didn't know, who beckoned from the corner of a room' and unendurable days that drive her out to walk the streets till Graeme's afternoon return, 'I felt strongly and certainly the ice touch, the chill pricking across my shoulders and head and down my back – and I blocked the welling scream with my hand'. From home they write, 'It must be a burying place for this to happen'.

This is a book that, very carefully, says what it means. Is this what it means to accept 'bi-cultural' literature, society? Other world-views, as other people, must no longer be converted, not even assimilated, but – accepted?

What impresses one is the variety, versatility, and verve of this short book. Though the book's base is rural the 'city scapes' are entirely adequate; in country or town Patricia Grace is mistress of her scene: 'a quiescent sea, burning silver from the flagellation of a full sun', 'Wooden loofballs of the hundreds of wooden people and their unheard crying'. The continuing comedies and errors of domestic trivia are exactly right. When she persuades her Nanny Ripeka to accept and attend her wedding, their spontaneous recitation of genealogies is a convincing and moving scene. The story moves swiftly, but can linger at need, the largely – by no means entirely – elliptic, oblique intrusion of the preternatural is tactful and delicately timed.

*Mutukohema* should also, with no pretension, be seen in a world perspective. In his book *An Introduction to Contemporary History* Barraclough writes: 'The

European age – the age which extended from 1498 to 1947 – is over, and with it the predominance of the old European scale of values'. I have heard both Wit Ihimaera and Patricia Grace suggest the phrase 'literature of reconstruction' to describe the conscious task of this decade's rise of Maori writing. This resembles the socially conscious, programmatic stance common in 'Third World' writing. *Metazemua*, a book in no sense didactic but a serious tale most excellently told, seems as valuable a contribution as anything yet published in New Zealand.

PETER ALCOCK

Robert D. Hamner, ed., *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul*. Three Continents Press, 1977. 333 pages. n.p.a.

Three Continents Press' series of 'critical perspectives' on various writers and national literatures is a fine initiative; an editor uses his expertise in a specific field to gather a selection of the most valuable criticism on the topic in question, and thus can save the student or the interested reader (who may be identical) a lot of bibliographical trouble.

Robert Hamner, who has edited this selection of essays on and by V. S. Naipaul, is acutely aware of an editor's great responsibility:

The editor of a collection of essays must determine where to leave off expounding upon his subject and when to allow the material its rightful forum.

He makes his criteria of inclusion unmistakably clear:

selection for inclusion has been determined by an article's relevance to Naipaul's work and by the quality of literary evaluation rather than by whether a critic judged Naipaul favorably or unfavorably.

Unfortunately Robert Hamner seems to have found it difficult to maintain these highly respectable principles simultaneously; he opens the book with his own lengthy introduction (sixteen pages) which includes summaries of Naipaul's books and abounds in interpretations. In addition to this, he has contributed the longest essay in the book (thirty-four pages – one contributor, Gordon Rohlehr, is allowed twenty-six pages, the others between five and nineteen). This means that of the 207 pages dedicated to criticism on Naipaul, roughly 25% has been provided by the editor himself.

On the whole I do not find the editor's selection of essays on Naipaul at all

obvious, and this goes for both contributors and subjects: there are no articles by Kenneth Ramchand, Landeg White, George Lamming or Wilson Harris; there are five long discussions of *The Mimic Men* (three essays dealing almost exclusively with this novel), whereas there is only one short review of *Garrifalé*, and *In a Free State* is only mentioned *ex passant*. Alastair Niven's 'V. S. Naipaul's Free Statement' from 1975 would have been an obvious choice, being both a penetrating analysis of the novel and a critical discussion of Naipaul's increasing formal skill and of his vision in the latest works; criticism on these is generally underrepresented in this book.

The main merits of the book are the extensive annotated bibliography and the collection of a number of articles by Naipaul himself, which are otherwise unavailable in book form, but central for an understanding of his work, especially 'Conrad's Darkness' from 1974.

JOHANNES RIIS

Albert Marie Gomes, *All Papa's Children*. Cairi Publishing House, 1978. 113 pages. n.p.a. (Orders and further information may be obtained from Cairi Publishing House, 73 Beauchamp Rd., East Molesey, Surrey, England.)

*All Papa's Children* is the first publication of Cairi Publishing House.

The firm takes its name from the Carib name for Trinidad and intends to concentrate on West Indian literature. Appropriately enough, its first publication is a novel by Albert M. Gomes, former chief minister of Trinidad and Tobago. If *All Papa's Children* is an indication of the standard of the new publishing venture it promises well. Set in colonial Trinidad the book deals with the life of the Portuguese community, an area largely unexplored in West Indian literature. It describes a small group of people each of whom typifies an attitude to the complexity of Trinidadian life: the colour-prejudiced money-grabbing hypocritical shop-keeper Mariné Cueva whose motto is that he 'doesn't give a damn who rules as long as they let him make his money'; his domineering wife Monica who sees through him, and though she has resigned herself to her dreary lot tries to uphold some moral values, and their twelve-year-old son who is sensitive and confused, but absorbed into the black community life of the island through the servants Dorothea and Esau. Dorothea epitomizes the dilemma of the black maid; working all her life for the same family she cannot afford to hate it, and yet the glaring injustice of the economic difference between her and the family cannot but make her bitter. She has

learned 'the art of subservience! - with all it entails: the endless salaaming, the bespoken smile, the mechanical high-spiritedness'. The insight that Gomes shows into Dorothea's dilemma and the sympathy and gentleness with which he treats her are symptomatic of this treatment of character and account for much of the success of the book. Esau is the black servant who was taken in as an infant by 'papa' and educated along with his own sons. After Papa's death he followed the daughter into her new home, and he thus feels more like a brother to Monica than a servant. Precariously placed between, on the one hand, his low status and colour and, on the other hand, his superior education and almost family status he is mainly concerned with preserving his dignity. The main character, Ernesto Montales, is the wayward brother of Monica who rejects the values of the Portuguese society, marries a coloured woman and goes to live in St. Babb's, a black slum. In the last chapter of the book Gomes switches to first person narrative and discusses his reasons for going into politics. It becomes apparent that Ernesto Montales is himself. This self-analysis is candid and appears exceptionally honest.

The main emphasis of the book is on description of character, the plot is very slight and serves only to link the characters together. The author has a good ear for the spoken language and this, combined with his character portrayal, makes *All Papa's Children* a book well worth reading.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Sol T. Plaatje *Mhudi* Heinemann, London 1978. 118 pages £1.20.  
David Cook, *African Literature. A Critical View*, Longman, London, 1977. 240 pages. £6.50.

Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* is a classic, and its inclusion in Heinemann's African Writers Series will give it the large readership it deserves. Written in 1917 and first published in 1930 it is probably the first novel written in English by a black African. It deals with an incident during the Matabele Wars which took place in the eighteen thirties. Under king Mzilikazi the Matabele carved an empire for themselves in Central South Africa and reduced the other tribes to tribute paying vassal states. In 1830 the Barolong branch of the Bechuana tribe to which Sol Plaatje's family belonged killed Mzilikazi's tax collector. In retribution the Matabele sacked their town and put the nation to flight. They eventually moved along with other refugees to Thaba Nchu. Here they met the first voortrekkers with whom they combined to drive the Matabele out of the area.

In his excellent introduction to this edition Tim Couzens puts forward the

theory that Sol Plaatje is using this piece of history as a model for contemporary history which to him was the period centred around the 1913 Native Land Act. The subjugated people had combined to drive out the Matabele when the oppression became unbearable; the same thing could happen again. The warning is only implicit, but the text justifies the interpretation. The story of Zungu of old sounds the warning, 'he caught a lion's whelp and thought that, if he fed it with the milk of his cows, he would in due course possess a useful mainstiff to help him in hunting valuable specimens of wild beasts. The cub grew up, apparently tame and meek, just like an ordinary domestic puppy, but one day Zungu came home and found, what? It had eaten his children, chewed up his two wives, and in destroying it, he himself narrowly escaped being mauled.' Likewise Mafikazi's warning that 'when the Kiuas [whites] rob them of their cattle, their children and their lands they will weep their eyes out of their sockets' sounds prophetic.

In this connection it is useful to remember that Sol Plaatje was one of the founders of the South African Native National Congress, that he worked incessantly for native rights all his life and that he was a member of the deputation which Congress sent to London to appeal against the Native Land Act of 1913. Both his life and his other writings show him to be intensely involved politically, and this supports the model theory.

In his preface to the original edition Plaatje states two purposes, p. 21. 'This book has been written with two objects in view, viz. (a) to interpret to the reading public one phase of "the back of the Native mind"; and (b) with the readers' money, to collect and print (for Bantu Schools) Sechuana folk-tales'. He makes this explicit by adding p. 21: 'In all the tales of battle I have ever read, or heard of, the cause of the war is invariably ascribed to the other side'. He is thus concerned with redressing the historical balance. This he does by re-writing the history from the point of view of the Barolong and the Matabele. In doing so he scrupulously avoids the partiality of the white historians by including good and evil characters in all the warring parties.

Another way of redressing the historical balance is to describe the native society and its way of life as dignified and valuable. Plaatje describes the daily work, meetings, dances etc. of his people, and in this setting he places Mhadi his heroine. Slightly larger than life, she is the black woman, mother earth, Africa, wise, beautiful and courageous, yet she is also individualized. She moves through the novel as a central intelligence embodying the human values which were also Sol Plaatje's.

Heinemann is to be congratulated for making this invaluable classic available to a large reading public.

David Cook's book is divided into three parts, *Broad Perspectives*, *Close-up*



Studies, and *Studies in the Art of Persuasion*. The first part contains David Cook's personal analysis of some important issues connected with African Literature; the second part consists of close textual analyses of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, Soyinka's *Three Plays* and two only 'partially successful' works, Ekwensi's *Jagan Nana* and Peter Palangyo's *Dying in the Sun*. In the third part David Cook discusses non-fiction, 'works openly intended to influence our opinion' (p. 229): Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Lewis Nkosi's *Home and Exile* and – as a transitional – Okello Oculi's *Prostitute*.

The book is a scholarly achievement. It is well researched and is characterized by careful attention to details, a logical and coherent organization and a lucid style. It shows the love and care for literature which is the true hallmark of a man of letters. Perhaps it also shows some of the shortcomings of such a person.

In 'Broad Perspectives' David Cook attempts to define the difference between the attitude of the individual writer to his society in Africa and Europe. The writer is an individual facing society in both parts of the world, but society differs. In Europe it is 'a computer-like system of social conventions and controls, restrictive beyond the furthest extremes of African social tradition' (p. 7); this is established by careful reference to writers like Hardy and George Eliot, whereas the African writer sees the body of society as 'healthy and consolidated' (p. 16). Thus the difference is simply this that 'One is born into a disjointed society and yearns for real human contact. The other is ordained to live in a contentedly conforming group and finds himself restless within it' (p. 16).

When summarized thus and divested of David Cook's scholarly style and reasoning this point of view seems somewhat simplistic; it is ironic that he should continue with a discussion of the culture clash. Talking about *A Man of the People* David Cook maintains that 'In *A Man of the People* this [being confronted by a 'mechanical administration'] is a new situation, not an inherited problem'. This, I find is begging the question. The African writer is a recent phenomenon, and he has surely inherited one of the most divided worlds ever to be left as a legacy with the inevitable result of alienation etc.

Seen against this background one could turn David Cook's assertion upside down. Modern African writers must surely have good reasons to envy their Victorian counterparts like e.g. Tennyson and Browning their easy acceptance into the 'contentedly conforming group' of their society. With regard to Hardy it should be remembered that he fought all his life to preserve the values of a vanishing rural society, a concern he shares with many contemporary African writers. To borrow David Cook's words about Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* 'he sings the swan-song of a tradition which is about to be transformed' (p. 67).

Whatever the differences between the attitude of African and European writers to their societies are, they cannot be defined in such simple terms. It would seem that in his obvious admiration of African society David Cook is blind to its complexities and flaws.

The close-up studies are, as I have already mentioned, rewarding reading, particularly the analyses of *Dying at the Sun* and *Jaguar Nana* where the author's attitude to these 'lights which are partly hidden under bushels' (p. 128) is refreshingly un-cynical. So much has been written about Achebe's books that it is almost impossible to be original about them. In the article on *No Longer at Ease* one finds the germ of what is going to develop into a trend in the last section of the book; an unwillingness or inability to express a point of view on any matter which could be called controversial. In this case the problem concerned is why the Umuofian society helped Obi get an education. 'What, then, was Obi educated for by the elders of his clan? For his own good, or a vested interest' (p. 84). If the answer is 'a vested interest' it of course implies a criticism of traditional village society; if the answer is 'for his own good' this would contradict the text. Here is David Cook's answer; 'Perhaps the fairest way to put it is to say that he was educated by a group for the good of the group, including himself' (p. 84). This tendency takes on disastrous proportions in the article on *The Wretched of the Earth*. The idea of including non-fiction or 'the art of persuasion' is a good one; through a careful stylistic analysis David Cook seeks to discover the - hidden and otherwise - means and tricks of persuasion. This is interesting if a little repetitive in the section dealing with *Facing Mount Kenya* but because of the controversial nature of Fanon, and Cook's unwillingness to commit himself it falls apart in the chapter on *The Wretched of the Earth*. It is not so much that the centre cannot hold, but rather that there seems to be no centre. A stylistic analysis will reveal this. Almost every main clause is either preceded or followed by a qualifying minor clause thus neutralizing the impact and meaning of the statement in the main clause. Here are some examples; 'It is true that; but if; quite apart from; Fanon might be seen as; but after all this has been said; although he has; - he is far from;' (p. 208); 'If Fanon generalises a great deal, it is also true that he knows a great deal' (p. 204). The author even manages to fit this kind of doubleness into a single main clause; 'Fanon displays no false modesty in willingly adopting the role of a prophet' (p. 213). On the surface this sentence is praising Fanon - 'no false modesty' and 'willingness' are positive, but normal connotations with 'willingly' in connection with 'prophet' are negative like in the following sentence, 'he willingly turned himself into the prophet of the movement'. Qualifiers like 'self-styled' come readily to mind. Thus both admirers and denigrators of Fanon can be pleased. To the vexed question of whether Fanon's vision has actually been fulfilled in the fifteen years since he wrote the book Cook answers,

"Yet it is not implausible to attribute current problems primarily to failures in the areas he identified" (p. 213). The basic controversy of whether to accept a marxist view of history is solved in the following way: "'History repeats itself' is both true and untrue". This amounts to the ludicrous. There is a fine line between, on the one hand an often courageous unwillingness to completely accept defined systems of thought and on the other, a total unwillingness or inability to express any point of view. Unfortunately David Cook crosses this line and in doing so mars an otherwise scholarly achievement.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Michael Thorpe, *Doris Lessing's Africa*. Evans Brothers. 129 pages. Csd £3.95, paper £2.75.

Most of the criticism written so far on Doris Lessing's works has been concerned with their value and purity as weapons for women's liberation. Because of that, Michael Thorpe's short 'critical commentary' on the Africa which looms so large in Lessing's production, the first part especially, is a most welcome contribution to the critical work on one of the most prominent present day writers.

In six chapters Michael Thorpe discusses Lessing's Africa as presented in (1) *The Grass is Singing*, (2) the Short Stories, (3) the Short Novels, (4) the *Children of Violence* sequel, and (5) *The Golden Notebook*.

The analyses of the three first mentioned (all of which are set in Africa only) are by far the most satisfactory and informative. The chapters on *Children of Violence* and *The Golden Notebook* are more dubious, and it is a question if the latter should not have been left out altogether and substituted with a brief thematic comparison between Lessing and white African liberals such as Nadine Gordimer and Alan Pason. This would have brought out more distinctly the sharpness with which Lessing saw the predicament in Southern Africa already in the early fifties. To try and isolate the Africa of *The Golden Notebook* for examination in a few pages is as absurd as it is impossible, and this comes out relentlessly. The author beats about the bush, resorting to rather futile digressions and accounts of e.g. the distorted chronology in B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* from 1969, and what he does say about *The Golden Notebook* in general and on its Africa in particular is superficial and abortive, which is hardly surprising, also because Anna Wulf's African experience, by the nature of the novel, is naturally much more important as *experience* than as *African*. Lessing's conception of nature is by no means unambiguous or easy to handle,

but in his rather strained effort to make references (e.g. to Wordsworth) and show the transformation of the African landscape into an 'inner Africa', a 'despairing metaphor for Martha Quesi's lost freedom' – essential as that is – it seems to me that Michael Thorpe generally fails to pay sufficient attention to Lessing's cosmic awe and awareness of ecological responsibility, which 'the thank God, still impersonal and indifferent African landscape' instilled in her when very young – and which is one element it would have been natural to focus on in a study like this.

JOHANNES RIIS

Saros Cowasjee, *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1977. 205 pages. Rs. 60.

Saros Cowasjee, *Coolie: An Assessment*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1976. 62 pages. Rs. 5.

Saros Cowasjee is well known for his work on Mulk Raj Anand. This latest book is a major work of criticism. The author has very wisely restricted himself to a critical discussion of Mulk Raj Anand's novels; to attempt an assessment of all of Anand's output, his short stories, his essays and books on art, philosophy, education, contemporary civilization and the many other subjects he has dealt with would involve one in several volumes of criticism. Four of the five chapters in the book consist of detailed analyses of Anand's novels, from *Untouchable* (1935) to *Confession of a Lover* (1976).

The opening chapter entitled 'The Making of a Novelist' is particularly useful for the information it provides about Anand's life, ideals and attitudes to literature. Of especial interest is the section 'The Years Abroad 1925-45'. Here Cowasjee traces Anand's development as a writer and the influences upon him. He argues that too much has been made of Forster's influence on Anand and suggests that he owed a much greater debt to Bonamy Dobrée. He tells how T. S. Eliot and Anand met but never became friends. He then quotes Anand's review of *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (1941):

But he is a most disarming critic. Under cover of his admiration for Kipling's truly great qualities as a versifier, Mr Eliot is able to pass him off not only as a considerable poet but as the dreamer of a great and noble dream of Empire, in spite of his own rather modest description of himself as 'I... the war drum of the white man round the world'. The publisher says: 'We need

not labour the significance of the fact that the selection has been made by a distinguished modern poet and critic at a time when all that Kipling prized is in danger'. . . So the volume may, from one point of view, be regarded as Mr Eliot's bit in the war effort.

It seems ungrateful not to accept 'this first citizen of India' whom Mr Eliot offers us with all the weight of his great authority, but he is better seen as he really was, the natural product of an expanding phase of Empire and complacency, than as a righteous innocent 'who didn't mean no harm'.

One understands the reason for the coolness that existed between them.

Whilst the author obviously has respect and admiration for Mulk Raj Anand and his writing he doesn't allow this to blind him to Anand's shortcomings. There are flaws in Anand's novels and Cowasjee is the first to acknowledge them. He doesn't refute the charge that at times Anand has written documentary novels. What he does show, however, is Anand's ability to make the documentary artistic. One of the best sections in the book is Cowasjee's discussion of *Private Life of an Indian Prince*. He regards this novel as Anand's finest achievement and presents it as a splendid example of the writer's ability to shape historical material into a work of art.

The final chapter deals not only with the three last novels but also with *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face* and *Confessions of a Lover*, books which Cowasjee calls dramatized autobiographies with fictional overtones.

Cowasjee regards the novels written since *Private Life of an Indian Prince* as unsuccessful but argues that it is necessary to assess them if Anand's achievement is to be placed in its proper perspective. He discusses the reason for the decline and agrees with Hayden Moore Williams that with the disappearance of the British 'enemy' Anand appears to have been left without a subject. Cowasjee suggests that a major reason for the success of *Private Life of an Indian Prince* was that Anand's personal predicament happily conjoined with a powerful theme. After this novel personal crisis and clear political vision never combined again to enliven any of his last three novels. With the departure of the British, Anand never again found an enemy who could draw out of him all the passions and the furies that were fired by the cause of Indian freedom.

This book is extremely well researched. A personal friend of the author's Cowasjee is able to draw on much interesting and previously unpublished material and on criticism not readily available to the average scholar. The latter will also find the *Select Bibliography* which contains over three hundred entries extremely useful.

*Casfie: An Assessment* This small booklet is an excellent study guide for all

students of Goethe. The first two chapters, 'The Making of a Novelist' and 'Literary Creed', are an abridged version of the introductory chapter of *So Many Freedoms*. The bulk of the book is taken up with an analysis of Goethe and this is followed by a brief but useful note on Anand's prose style. Both books are welcome additions to the works of criticism on one of India's major literary figures.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

**Working Party on Library Holdings of Commonwealth Literature. A Handbook of Library Holdings of Commonwealth Literature.** United Kingdom & Europe. Comp. and ed. by Ronald Warwick. British Library Lending Division. 1977. 123 pp. price. £ 2.25

This reference book is a thoroughly revised edition of the handbook compiled by Gail Wilson in 1971 under the auspices of the Working Party on Library Holdings of Commonwealth Literature. The Working Party has also been closely involved with the new handbook which has been compiled and edited by Ronald Warwick, area librarian in the Library of the Commonwealth Institute in London.

The book has a preface by Dr. Alastair Niven, Director of the Africa Centre in London. Dr. Niven mentions the activities of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) and its increasing number of members from Universities and libraries not only in Great Britain, but throughout Scandinavia and Western Europe, and he stresses the need for a checklist of library holdings of Commonwealth literature in Europe as well as in the U.K.

In an introductory chapter the compiler explains the aim and scope of the book. For the purpose of the handbook Commonwealth Literature is defined as creative literature written in English by a national of any Commonwealth country other than the United Kingdom. Critical works, reference works, biographies, etc. are included and collections of related interest (historical, sociological, political) have been noted.

The handbook is divided into two sections dealing with libraries in the United Kingdom and Europe respectively. The first section is prefaced by a general survey of library holdings of Commonwealth literature in the U.K. Problems of locating late eighteenth and nineteenth century literary material and difficulties in locating and providing material produced by local presses

within the Commonwealth are pointed out. The tendencies towards geographical specialization are reflected in the descriptions of the area-orientated collections in libraries with holdings from individual Commonwealth countries within the various parts of the world. The section covering the United Kingdom consists of forty entries. The entries are arranged alphabetically under the town in which the libraries are situated. Within one town the libraries are listed alphabetically. Not all collections are given a separate entry. In some cases smaller collections must be looked up in the index and found under the entry of a nearby larger library.

A library entry gives the following data: Name and address of library; Telephone and telex numbers. Name of nearest railway station, as well as bus or tram number. Hours of opening, rules for admission and loans, and information about availability of micro-readers and facilities for xerox copying. The running commentary following each entry deals with size of holdings, acquisitions policy, area of specialization, details of special collections, as well as availability of catalogues and publications.

The directory of twenty-two libraries in Europe is prefaced by an introduction to European collections. The compiler is rightly aware of the fact that information derived from a questionnaire only cannot give a satisfactory result. One would have welcomed a more detailed account of the organisation of European and especially of Scandinavian libraries. As this has not been given, I shall advise visitors from overseas to do some background reading. A useful account of Scandinavian libraries has been written by K.C. Harrison, the former President of the Commonwealth Librarians Associations.<sup>1</sup>

It must be born in mind that libraries in non-Commonwealth countries have no obligation towards provision of Commonwealth literature. Nevertheless there is an interest in Europe in books in English by major authors regardless of their nationalities. The growing awareness of creative writing from developing countries is also reflected in library provisions of national and university libraries as well as of public libraries. Scandinavian libraries have commenced action at governmental level in the field of library resources for immigrant workers.<sup>2</sup>

The entries covering Continental Europe is prefaced by short notes on smaller collections followed by an alphabetical arrangement under country and within country by the name of the library. The compiler has wisely refrained from bringing more than a few entries from Eastern Europe. Requests for copies of articles on Commonwealth literature from individual researchers in Eastern Europe are occasionally received in the State and University Library in Aarhus. This seems to indicate difficulties in obtaining such material from local libraries.

Although many important research establishments and libraries have been

included in the second part of the directory, the choice of entries seems rather haphazard. The directory would have been more useful if there had been entries from the Royal Library in Stockholm and the University Libraries of Uppsala and Oslo. They are libraries with more than two million volumes and with considerable holdings of creative literature in English including Commonwealth literature. Researchers with an interest in African affairs will be surprised at the omission of the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala. The Institute is a major documentation and research centre for current African affairs.

Due to some inexplicable misunderstanding the information about the State and University Library at Aarhus and the Institute Library of the English department of Aarhus University has been mixed together in one entry. The result is that neither of the libraries has been correctly described. This is rather unfortunate as the English Institute houses the Commonwealth Department which is a major research centre for Commonwealth studies in Europe. Its library can boast the the most significant collection of Commonwealth literature in Europe outside the U.K. The head of the department is Anna Rutherford, chairman of the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.

Apart from the unhandy format (probably dictated by the need to economize) the handbook is easy to use. The index would have benefited from more cross references from the names of libraries in the vernacular to the forms of names in English.

The handbook is a welcome addition to the librarian's reference shelf and it should be available in all institutions with an interest in Commonwealth Literature.

VIBEKE STENDERUP

#### NOTES

1. Harrison, K.C.: *Librarians in Scandinavia*, rev. ed. 1969
2. Unesco Bulletin for Libraries, Vol. XXXII, no. 1, 1978, p. 23: 'The immigrant worker and the Danish public library system'.

Dorothy Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand*. Press Porcépic, 1977. \$6.95.

Dorothy Livesay is well-established as one of Canada's great contemporary poets. Especially during the last decade her collections of poetry and her readings throughout the country have won her an ever increasing audience. Twice



she has been awarded the highest official recognition: The Governor General's Award for Poetry. We have come to know her as a deeply dedicated and sincere poet; her love poems have a frankness and an honest sensuality about them which is unique in Canadian literature. A recent volume of poetry, *For Age* (1975) subtly explores in a very personal and courageous way what it is like to grow old and to be acutely aware of the discrepancy between a zealous and alert mind and an ageing and frail body.

It is bound to create a stir when a poet like Dorothy Livesay publishes a volume of a very different order dealing with her life and work in the 30s, one of the most traumatic decades in the history of Canada. She came to maturity at a time when Canada, like many other countries, was hit by depression, unemployment, wide-spread social unrest and political polarization. With the help of two editors, David Arnason and Kim Todd, Dorothy Livesay has written a valuable book on the thirties seen, not through the objective and scrutinizing eyes of a historian or economist, but through the eyes of a deeply committed artist. The book reminds one of a collage; numerous widely different items brought together and controlled by a running commentary by Dorothy Livesay. We learn about her comfortable family background and the political climate that turned her into a very active socialist and feminist and a member of the Canadian Communist Party. Her personal development is reflected in the chosen material which not only consists of poems, stories and articles by Dorothy Livesay herself but of related letters, newspaper clippings, posters, photos and paintings.

In *Right Hand Left Hand* we watch the emergence of a committed socialist writer who courageously discloses social evils in Canada; we also witness the rise and fall of the Canadian Left. The book offers a first-class insight in the strong influence that the Russian model had on the intellectual Left in all Western countries. In this documentary collage Dorothy Livesay comes out as a political writer producing class-partisan literature in complete agreement with Lenin's view of the role of literature under the new order. There is an implicit defence of the Russian Proletkult (p. 230) at a time when Stalin through Zhdanov had already stamped out all artistic freedom. In 'The Beet Workers' a Soviet model is discretely suggested to solve a specific problem within the agriculture of Alberta despite the fact that even in 1936 the Western countries were well aware of the human costs of forced collectivization and of 5-year planning under Stalin. To this reviewer this suggests a certain degree of political naïveté. Nevertheless these pages also reflect a practical idealism whose prime target was, as the decade wore on, not revolution but the defeat of Fascism at home and abroad.

In *Right Hand Left Hand* we experience Dorothy Livesay as a political propagandist. It is important for its historical and biographical elements which

throw a light on Dorothy Livesay, the poet. And it is in her poetry, deeply rooted in the Anglo-American poetry of this century that she best brings out her universal message, and she has done so in such a manner that she has assured herself a safe place in the history of Canadian literature.

JØRN CARLSEN

Claude McKay, *Poems Above Poems*, No. 2: *Trial By Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in North America*. Translated from the Russian by Robert Winer; edited and introduced by A. L. McLeod, with Preface by H. H. Anniah Gowda. 41 pages. n.p.a.

The Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research of the University of Mysore has started a new series of books concerned with regional literature in English. With the world becoming increasingly integrated and one-dimensional, it would perhaps be apt to recall ancient dicta about the truth always being to some extent 'local' and residing in the 'nuances'. And the Mysore enterprise certainly brings to mind Cleanth Brooks once speculating in class that the really great literature of the 20th century would seem to be 'regional', coming to us from the provinces rather than from the metropolis: Yeats, Joyce, Frost, Hemingway, Faulkner were all of them regionalists, even Eliot was when he was at his youngest best and a 'real' poet, rather than a philosophical ruminator.

In the first volume of the new Mysore series the topic was South Pacific Writing (poems, stories, criticism). In this second volume we find three re-discovered stories by Claude McKay (1889-1948), who, born in Jamaica, became a literary father-figure in the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s with such lines as

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an unglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

those famous lines written on the occasion of the Harlem race riots in 1919 and many years later recited, a little vulgarly perhaps, as a rallying cry by Winston Churchill and Senator Cabot Lodge, Sr., during the Second World War.

Like so many of his contemporaries in the Twenties, Claude McKay wanted to see what the future was like and in association with *The Liberator* and *The Marxist* he went to see Lenin and Trotsky in Russia in 1922. McLeod recalls in

his introduction McKay's troubles with the American Communist delegation to the Fourth Congress of the Third Internationale, and then he goes on to explain about the background of the three stories in this volume: during his stay in Russia McKay published in 1925, in Russian translation, the three stories in a booklet *Sudom Lyacha* (*Trial by Lynching*). The booklet was discovered in the Slavic Section of the New York Public Library in 1973 and has now been re-translated into English. The stories, 'Trial by Lynching', 'The Mulatto Girl' and 'The Soldier's return', give interesting evidence about a young poet's struggle to move into another genre, that of prose narration. They reveal his anger barely and clumsily contained in irony, they show his first uncertain steps towards dramatic dialogue, they are in fact clearly a 'beginner's work'. But they are interesting for the light they throw on McKay's development as writer, they will be of interest to any theorist of literature preoccupied with *genre*, and with certain topical subjects (e.g. 'The Soldier's Return' describing the 'welcome home' given to black soldiers returning from the War in France and wearing uniforms!). These stories are of particular value to the cultural historian bent on recapturing the local nuance. That McKay was writing in a special context (cp. the Communist Party's interest in the American racial issue in the 1920s) and very much for a particular audience (he explains for the uninitiated reader about Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* in 'Trial By Lynching') gives an added richness to the volume's particularity. The Mysore series is, indeed, a new and a welcome venture in university publishing.

ERIK ARNE HANSEN

## Journals

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### AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

The decision to recommence publication of *Australian Book Review* is one which will be welcomed by all and will prove a valuable, if not indispensable, guide to all persons and institutions interested in Australian studies.

Published monthly the annual subscription is A\$20 and should be sent to The Subscription Department, *Australian Book Review*, 46 Porter Street, Prahran 3181, Victoria, Australia.

Issue No. 4 is a special issue on Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. It includes the following essays:

Robert Mane, 'The Grass is Singing: Pourquoi ce roman?'

Bruce King, 'Doris Lessing's Africa'

Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Woman and the World of Things: a reading of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*'

Jacques Leclaire, 'The Grass is Singing' roman de la déintégration'

Jean-Pierre Dorix, 'Fragmentation in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*'

Jean Sirey, 'Nouvelles de la Société'

Available from Professor R. Mane, Department of English, University of Pau, France.

## Conference Reports

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Seminar on Modern African Literature, held at Vingsted conference centre, Denmark, 15-17 March 1978.

The course was funded by the Danish association of English Teachers in secondary schools and organized and run by members of staff of the Commonwealth Institute at Aarhus University. There was a maximum attendance of 40 delegates and the course was fully booked up.

As the reading list shows lectures were organized according to subject matter. This was done to accommodate the prevailing teaching method in Danish grammar schools which centres around projects; each of the subject headings on the reading list could form such a 'project'. The reading list had been sent out prior to the course, and a book mailing service arranged through the university bookshop so that delegates could read the texts – or some of them – before the actual course took place. The time table was crowded, and the conference was very much a working conference. Apart from lectures on the subjects on the reading list given by Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Petersen, there was a lecture on the political situation in Africa with special

reference to Tanzania, given by Sven Poulsen, a journalist and author of several books about Africa, and a lecture on African Art, given by Torben Landhæk from the Department of Ethnography at the National Museum in Copenhagen.

On the entertainment side there was an exhibition of African sculpture and masks, an exhibition of cloth paintings by the Nigerian artist Michael Adetyole, a book exhibition and a playreading of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* by students and members of staff at the Department of English, Aarhus University. Several British publishers (Longmans, Evans, Macmillans, Oxford University Press) had contributed to the exhibition, and every book on an African subject which the university bookshop had in stock was brought along – and they were all sold; in fact there was competition for some of them.

The seriousness and enthusiasm of the delegates made it clear that much of the material dealt with during the conference would be ploughed straight back into teaching in secondary schools, and letters of inquiry about texts, secondary literature etc. which I have received since have confirmed this impression.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Reading list for lectures and discussion groups:

#### THE CULTURE CLASH

Bieck, *Song of Lovers and Song of Ours*

Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Ham Mukasa, *Sir Appapo Discovers London*

Soyinka, *The Lion and the Jewel*

Selected poems:

#### CARGO CULT

Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*

Armah, *Fragments*

Amu Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*

#### WARS OF LIBERATION

Ngugi, *Weep Not Child*

Mwangi, *Carcase for Hounds*

Ngugi and Mugo, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Ngugi, *Secret Lover*

Selected poems:

#### CORRUPTION

Achebe, *A Man of the People*  
Okara, *The Voice*  
Aluko, *His Worshipful Majesty*  
Selected poems

All poetry was taken from Soyinka, ed., *Poems of Black Africa*.

### The Fifth European Conference of ACLALS, Malta, 28-31 March 1978.

The Grand Hotel Verdala in Rabat on the island of Malta could serve any third-world poet as an excellent symbol of colonialism. Set with cool indifference onto the highest point of the island, dominating and yet isolated from the dwellings and daily lives of the islanders, satisfied with its own rather creaky respectability (please dress up for dinner – tough mutton and over-boiled cabbage) which it supports with a burst of 'culture' (Victorian bar-room ballads – please be quiet and try to look pious) between the ever-so-swinging dances, it was the ideal setting for a conference on post-colonial literature. And the participants at the conference, when they were not in session denouncing the sins of imperial masters, certainly made the most of the swimming-pool, the comfortable lounges, and of course the bars.

Yes really, the 'Verdala' was an excellent setting: not only because of its ironic appropriateness and because of the way it showed up the blind spots of those participants who did not appreciate the irony, but also because it was an eminently practical solution to some bothersome practical problems. That one could confer formally and informally as well as eat sleep and relax, all under one roof, assisted the smooth running of the conference greatly. And it ran remarkably smoothly. An essential basis for this success was the unobtrusive yet untiring work of the organiser, Daniel Manna. To satisfy academics is a notoriously difficult task, yet here were sixty of these irascible souls, none of whom had anything but praise for Daniel's handling of the innumerable large and small problems that cropped up. Naturally, there were many differences of opinion, and once or twice the discussions showed signs of becoming acrimonious, but that they never actually did so is in large part due to the civilised agreement on essentials which underlay the disagreements on details.

The less formal aspects of the conference have a special value of their own.

they permit a degree more freedom of speech than the formal discussions do – if only because one is not under the same pressure to keep to the point! But the suggestion, made by some senior members of the Association, that these informalities are the real business of the conference and that the presentation of papers should be reduced to a minimum is surely a serious error. It is in the formal sessions that the results of months, in some cases years, of research can be presented to an interested and critical public for examination and discussion, which in turn will stimulate the continuation and development of the research programs. It is also difficult to see how a conference on Commonwealth Literature could do justice to the fascinating range of the subject in a handful of papers. In terms of genres, style and other literary categories the range is perhaps less wide than one might naively imagine – there is, it seems to me, sufficient consistency in these matters to justify the term 'Commonwealth Literature', no matter how difficult it may be to define it. But in geographic terms the range is, of course, immense, and it was encouraging to see that no major English-speaking area was ignored by this 'European' conference.

Australia was represented by a strong contingent of guests, direct from down under, and several papers concerned themselves with Australian themes. June Factor (London) was able to show that the literary representation of the immigrant population in Australia is highly relevant to the major themes of the conference (not only 'The Community and the Individual', but also the relationship of majority and minority groups within the community). The liveliness of the discussion on the 1890s was especially striking and it is satisfying to see that the past is now being taken as seriously as the present. New Zealand, on the other hand, had to be satisfied with two half-papers, both of which must be passed over in silence.

Not every Australian present spoke about Australia. Indeed there are encouraging signs that people in many Commonwealth countries are becoming aware of the literary cultures of other post-colonial societies (but have we thought enough about our relationship to the literatures of Spanish, French and Portuguese ex-colonies?). Helen Tiffin (Queensland) spoke on West-Indian writers; Gareth Griffiths (Macquarie) spoke cleverly about the ritual elements in Soyinka's plays.

There was also a strong contingent of guests from Canada, most of whom did speak (very interestingly) about their own literature. On the other hand the European hosts found comparatively little to say about Australia and Canada, apart from a thoroughly researched paper on Joseph Furphy from Xavier Pons (Toulouse).

A set of coincidental clashes with other papers prevented me from hearing more than two of the papers on India, but this region was also very adequately covered.

But as things turned out the strongest geographical emphasis was laid on Africa. Of course the geographical division is not the only possible, nor perhaps the most important classification of the material discussed at the conference. Thematic categories are at least equally important and the emphasis on Africa could be interpreted thematically, since the political and social problems reflected in African literature are also present – but perhaps less obviously – in all of the Commonwealth regions. The geographic emphasis on Africa could be seen, then, as a thematic emphasis on the question of justice and opportunity for individuals and for suppressed groups in various – frequently unstable – political and social systems. Some of the basic psychological and cross-cultural problems involved were clearly and rather frighteningly revealed by Bernth Lindfors (Texas) in his paper on the presentation of African materials on the nineteenth century London stage. By looking back one hundred years, Lindfors was able to establish sufficient distance to present his picture of prejudice and good-willed misunderstanding without polemics, but he didn't permit us the comfort of treating this material merely as 'past history' – he drew unusually perceptive parallels with popular culture in our own days, and set the more thoughtful listeners the problem of examining their own unconscious attitudes. Both for its scholarly range and for its moral force this was an unusually impressive paper.

In some respects the climax of the conference was reached at the session when three closely argued papers examined the extremely problematical relationship of political commitment and literary creation. I think of this as a climax because this theme was subliminally present in almost every paper presented, but at the session in question it came out clearly into the open. Dieter Riemenschneider (Frankfurt) posed the question of how an artist can simultaneously celebrate life and present anti-human forces in his work. This is a task faced by writers everywhere, but very acutely in South Africa. Riemenschneider demonstrated that Alex la Guma achieves this difficult balancing act by dealing with people who have been psychically damaged by racism, but presenting them through the medium of a subtly sensitive, highly conscious narrator.

Angus Calder (Scotland) presented a very different answer to the same basic question. In a highly informative talk on the often anthologised yet little-known Kenyan poet Jared Angira, he pointed out that a liberation of the imagination, provided that it is not merely an avoidance of but a conscious answer to political and social repression, can be an equally valid response for an author striving to preserve his individuality in a volatile and unpredictable society. The direct and literal representation of repression then becomes unnecessary.

In the third paper of the session, Jürgen Martini (Bremen) turned to a writer whose present situation demonstrates vividly the problem of the relationship of



a critical individual to his society: Ngugi wa Thiong'o. At its plenary session the conference passed a motion expressing its distress and the deep shock which Ngugi's arrest has caused. Martini's paper demonstrated yet again that the incorporation of political anger into the framework of a literary work creates difficulties and aesthetic tensions, which Ngugi has boldly faced.

It is unfortunately impossible to comment on all the papers (and would be, even if it had been possible to hear them all). But one group of papers does deserve special mention – those of our Maltese hosts. In spite of the interesting summaries presented at earlier conferences, and published in their proceedings, few of us have concerned ourselves seriously with Maltese writing. We shall have to do so in the future, for it is clear that there are poets, novelists and critics of considerable talent living on that small but culturally rich island, and they have something important to tell us about their own variation on the human condition.

I am sadly conscious of having left out much of value in this very personal account, the publication of the proceedings will do something to help, but those of us who were on the spot will carry a mass of pleasant and enriching memories with us. Malta the island, with its curiously rugged beauty, Malta the cultural centre, with its writers and personalities, and Malta the hospitable conference venue have made an imprint on Commonwealth studies which will be felt for many years to come.

NELSON WATTIE

University of Kent: 'The Uses of African and Caribbean Literature: Teaching and Criticism in the United Kingdom', 22-24 September 1978.

The inclusion in the subtitle of both criticism and teaching accounts for the importance and success of the conference as well as for its problems and difficulties. The conference was well attended (approx. one hundred and forty five delegates) and they fell into two groups: (a) critics and academics, (b) teachers from a variety of educational institutions, including technical colleges, adult education centres and comprehensive schools. The programme was divided between criticism and teaching with a clear emphasis on the latter, and during the conference the problems of getting African and Caribbean literature onto the school syllabus and teaching it in a classroom context emerged as the main

theme.

There is, perhaps, a danger in mixing two subjects at a conference like this; due to the fact that the speakers from either group knew that part of the audience was unfamiliar with their subject they tended to make their speeches of an introductory nature with the result that the ones who did know something about it did not learn as much as they could have done. However, there were also benefits to be shared by either group.

The panel discussing 'resources and publications' was an obvious one. Michael Foster gave a valuable insight into the work done at the Commonwealth Institute library to facilitate the distribution of African and Caribbean literature, Eric Huntley spoke about the New Beacon publishing firm and bookshop which concentrates on African and Caribbean literature, and James Currey gave us the history and future plans for Heinemann's African Writers Series. It was interesting to notice that after James Currey's speech the representatives of Macmillans, Rex Collings and Nelsons who were sitting in the audience jumped to their feet and gave details of their contributions to the publishing of African and Caribbean literature. Evidently, competition is fierce in this field.

Another shared benefit was the very enjoyable poetry reading by Dennis Brutus, John Agard and James Berry and the lecture by Chinua Achebe. The last mentioned spoke about the role of the modern writer in Africa whom he saw as 'instructor of mankind', a role he has inherited from the oral literature. Achebe asserted that because of this direct link with oral literature which was collective and therefore committed the modern African writer has a greater commitment to his society than his European contemporary.

At the panel discussion which followed Chinua Achebe's speech Professor Kinkad-Weekes gave the reasons why he thought that African and Caribbean literature should be taught. He supported his argument by analyses of extracts of texts handed out beforehand. Rhonda Cobham stressed the need for knowing the social background to West Indian literature in order to be able to appreciate it. Mary van de Water gave an exceedingly amusing account of her first experience of teaching African literature in the classroom. Apart from her wit she would seem to be the only person at the conference who had any practical experience of what we were all talking about: teaching these new literatures to school children. She was a member of a group of school teachers in Edinburgh who, on their own initiative, had taught African and Caribbean literature in their schools. In addition to this they also held weekly meetings about their experiences and published their findings in pamphlet form. Such grassroot activities must surely be the genuine beginning of a change, rather than directives from above.

Dipak Nandi from the Equal Opportunities Commission frankly admitted

that he had never taught African or Caribbean literature, but his contribution was nevertheless the most interesting one during the conference, not just because it was the most astringent and well organised, but also because it aroused a certain amount of controversy. After tracing the genesis of black studies Dipak Nandi suggested that there had been an over-emphasis on the past with a tendency to 'wallow in the misery of subjugation', which he called the 'moans and groans school of history'. He then suggested that black people should 'compete in the arena of real power' – in other words, forget about the past and get on with the present; become doctors and lawyers and get themselves onto influential boards and committees, and people will respect them. This is of course true, but Nandi's – no doubt realistic – acceptance of hard capitalist values offended some, in particular Lewis Nkosi who saw colonialism and imperialism as the root of most evils. One could also object that not every black man can compete in 'the arena of real power' and surely respect is also due to those outside it. In this connection one could mention Lewis Nkosi's contention that the introduction of black studies in schools would help to awaken the consciousness of the British working classes because they would realize – by analogy – that they were also discriminated against.

A little closer to the practical reality was Russell Proffits, the Deputy Head of Deptford Primary School, who spoke of his involvement in introducing black studies in his school, and Raymond Giles, Professor of Education at Massachusetts, who gave an amusing as well as informative account of the development of black studies in America.

The final session not surprisingly dealing with the topic 'planning for the future' had a very concrete result. A committee was elected, consisting of L. Garrison, Director of ACER, London; Dr Innes of Kent University; Alastair Niven, director of the Africa Centre in London; and Lewis Nkosi. Their initial task will be to contact teachers who might be interested in teaching black studies and set up and act as co-ordinators between regional groups who might wish to organize themselves along the lines of the Edinburgh group. Such a practical result is the logical outcome of what was very much a working conference, and the organizer, Dr Innes, is to be congratulated for having contributed towards the furtherance of African and Caribbean studies in such a positive and practical way.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

# ACLALS

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## FIJI CONFERENCE

The theme of the conference is 'Language and literature in multi-cultural contexts'. Offers of papers accompanied by a 300-word synopsis should be sent to Professor K. Goodwin, Department of English, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4067, Queensland, Australia. The conference will take place at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji between 3-8 January 1980.

## FINANCES

The Chairman has been informed by the Director of the Commonwealth Foundation that it will no longer be possible to finance large-scale pan-Commonwealth conferences. This puts the future of such conferences in doubt. One suggestion put forward is that regional conferences be continued with as much representation from other regions as possible.

## ACLALS BULLETIN

The first St Lucia issue is now in press and the second issue is due before December. The St Lucia committee have apologized for the delay pointing out that one of the problems has been finding a method of production sufficiently cheap to fit the budget.

## SPACLALS

### *South Pacific Images*

This book is the proceedings of the first SPACLALS conference and is reviewed in this issue. Copies are available to ACLALS members for \$A6 paid in advance.

## SPACLALS SHORT STORY COMPETITION

This was won by Subramani for his story 'Marigolds'. Subramani is a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of the South Pacific and edits *Masa: a South Pacific Journal of Language and Literature*.

## CACLALS

Cecil Abrahams reports that the recent conference held at Concordia University, Montreal was a tremendous success. The theme of the conference was 'The Commonwealth in Canada' and the majority of the time was devoted to addresses by writers who included Mulk Raj Anand, Witi Ihimaera, Samuel Selvon, Ron Blair, Michael Anthony and John Pepper Clark. A report on the conference will appear in the next issue of *Kanopipi*.

## EACLALS

### CONFERENCES

Dieter Riemenschneider has written to say that plans are progressing towards having the next conference of EACLALS in Frankfurt. The next issue of *Kanopipi* should carry more definite news.

## VISITING WRITER

Margaret Laurence declined the invitation and Margaret Atwood has now been invited. So far she has not replied.

## NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITIES

### Barcelona:

Doireann MacDermott has sent the following information about Barcelona:

We started this year 1977-78 with one course in our fifth year called 'Civilización de países de habla inglesa', an optional course for which about 35 students signed up. The theme this year was the early exploration and settlement of America compared with the early exploration of the Pacific and the settlement of Australia and New Zealand. Some students have

worked on assignments related to early settlers and the aborigines and so on and parallel to this they have read some Australian literature, including relevant short stories and *Voss*. We have also had film shows on the same lines.

Barcelona is the first university in Spain to take up Commonwealth studies which we hope to extend as we go along and build up more of a library.

#### Germany:

The second meeting of German scholars, university and school teachers interested in Commonwealth literature took place in Augsburg from 23-25 June 1978. The meeting was organised by Professor Jürgen Schäfer and the theme was the Commonwealth Short Story.

#### Italy:

Bernard Hickey has produced the first *Australian Literature Bulletin* whose aim is 'to provide a forum for Italian scholars to express their views on Australian literature and to keep them informed of latest developments at centres in Italy, Australia and beyond'.

#### Aarhus:

The event of the year was the Australian Arts Festival. A full report on the Festival will be included in the next issue of *Kurapipi*. This issue will have a special emphasis on Australia and a number of papers given at the conference which was run in conjunction with the Festival will be published.

The following courses were given at Aarhus in 1978: *Africa*: 1) 'Introduction to West African Literature', 2) 'Black South African Writing', 3) 'Dramas of Achol Fugard'. These courses were all given by Kirsten Holst Petersen.

*Australia*: 1) 'Convict Literature', 2) 'The Literature of Exploration', 3) 'Recent Australian Fiction', 4) 'Introduction to Australian Literature', 5) 'Australian Literature in the Seventies', 6-7) Two courses on Australian drama. The course on exploration was given by Dr R. Sellick, University of Adelaide, and the two courses on modern drama were given by David Williamson who was visiting professor at Aarhus during the Spring term. The course on Australian literature in the Seventies was shared between Mark O'Connor, Anna Rutherford and David Williamson. Anna Rutherford gave the remaining courses.

*Canada*: 1) 'Recent Canadian Fiction' given by Johannes Riss and 2) 'Margaret Laurence' given by Jørn Carlsen.

*India:* 'Continuity and Change: Recent English Literature in English' given by Philip Edmonds.

*New Zealand:* 'An Introduction to New Zealand Literature' given by Annemarie Backmann.

*West Indies:* 1) 'National Identity as a Literary Concern' and 2) 'Themes of Exile'. Both courses were given by Johannes Räs.

Apart from David Williamson, Robert Sellick and Mark O'Connor other visitors to Aarhus during 1978 included Dorothy Livesay, Robert Brissenden (Australian National University), Alan Lawson (University of Queensland), Michael Wilding (University of Sydney), Gareth Griffiths (Macquarie University), Marlis Thiersch (University of New South Wales). Delegates at the Festival included Randolph Stow, Les Murray, Peter Porter, Rosemary Wightson, Lloyd Robson, Stephen Murray-Smith, John Heyer.

Dangaroo Press published its third book, *Bird, Hawk, Bagie: Essays on Janet Frame* edited by Jeanne Delbarré.

## COMMONWEALTH POETRY PRIZE

The annual award of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize has gone to Timoshenko Aslanides for his first book of poetry *The Greek connection*.

Worth £250, the Prize is awarded annually for a first book of poetry in English by writers from Commonwealth countries other than Britain.

Timoshenko Aslanides was born in Sydney, Australia in 1943 of a Greek father and Australian mother. He began writing in 1974, publishing some fifty poems in magazines and newspapers. His book represents the best of his writing over the last three years, and reflects both his Greek and Australian heritage.

The judges also highly commended Kevin Hart for his book *The departance* (published by the University of Queensland Press, Paperback Poets Second Series no. 17. Agent in the U.K. - Prentice-Hall International).

## COMMONWEALTH POETRY PRIZE 1979

The Prize is awarded annually for a first book of poetry in English published by an author from a Commonwealth country other than Britain. Manuscripts and typescripts cannot be accepted.

Information can be obtained from Michael Foster, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High Street, London W8 6NQ, England.

## COMMONWEALTH SHORT STORY COMPETITION

The European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies proposes to award a prize of £500 for a previously unpublished short story written by a Commonwealth citizen.\* The story must be written in English and not exceed approximately 10,000 words. The Committee retains the right to publish any entry.

Entries (3 copies) accompanied by an entry fee of £5 should be submitted no later than 30 March 1979 to The Chairman of EACLALS, Department of English, University of Aarhus, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark.

\*For the purposes of definition a Commonwealth writer will be a citizen of any Commonwealth country other than Britain or a former Commonwealth citizen who has taken up British nationality.

## ALASTAIR NIVEN

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# The Africa Centre in London

By the early 1960's it was obvious that all of Africa would shortly be free of colonial domination. The British and the French had withdrawn; the Spanish seemed hardly aware of their small territories; and cracks were already showing in the Portuguese regime, which was having to contend with an increasingly severe independence struggle in Angola and Mozambique. A few thorns remained to be plucked from the colonial flesh, Rhodesia being the most awkward, and only the ingenuous would claim that all vestiges of European authority vanished with the lowering of flags. A new Africa had emerged, however. Were the former imperial capitals to forget about it all, retaining only statues and anthems as relics of their domain, or would a practical means be found of continuing the associations with Africa by educational and cultural contact?

The Africa Centre was a response to a felt need for such contact to be



maintained, President Kaunda of Zambia opened it in 1964, thus establishing from the start its informal relationship with African governments. This now extends to financial assistance from several governments, official visits to the Centre by ministers of African governments, and the use of the premises by embassies for social gatherings or cultural displays. But it was also realised from the start that, though the Africa Centre would attempt to be a focal-point for African affairs in London, it could not be a political institution and it could not be the 'front' for any party or national point of view. If that ever became the case it would lose credibility with all the Africans who did not share whatever view the Centre was supporting.

The result of this independence today is that the Africa Centre has become the natural place in London for people interested in Africa to get together amicably. Ethiopian actually talks to Somali on the premises; Ugandan exiles and Malawi dissidents feel at home here, yet the governments of these countries do not regard the Centre as a hotbed of fermenting revolution. People from all parts of Africa use the Centre for its social facilities, its educational programme and its information services. British people are welcome to it as a place to discover more about Africa.

In fourteen years the Africa Centre has become best-known for its programme of events and for its restaurant. The latter, called *The Calabash*, is open to the general public and under its Senegalese chef Paolo Diop serves the only authentic African food in London. It is recommended in the food guides of Britain and offers reasonably priced dishes from all parts of the continent, served in a pleasantly informal (some would say too much so) atmosphere. Try it the next time you are hungry in London. It is open Monday to Friday at lunch and in the evenings until after 10.30 p.m., and on Saturday evenings too.

Registered with the Department of Education and Science as an educational institution the Africa Centre offers an extensive programme of courses, lectures, panel discussions, films, plays and exhibitions. Here you can learn Arabic or Swahili (at times other languages too). You can try out your skill in African dance, be part of an African drama workshop, take a seminar course in African literature or follow a summer programme in Development Studies, during which the economic and agrarian problems of modern Africa are intensively analysed.

At least twice a week there is a lecture or some kind of discussion on an aspect of African life. It could be a demonstration of African drum-playing, a talk on wildlife in Zaïre, a tribute to an African writer or a debate on the Eritrean question. The programme is totally versatile, the only condition being that the speakers know what they talk about. We give platforms to both African and British politicians. We have poetry readings (Dennis Brutus was with us the day before I wrote this article). We also have lunchtime talks to mark

whatever aspect of African life is currently hot news. Thus Lord Fenner Brockway was speaking about Jomo Kenyatta at the Centre whilst Mzee's funeral took place in Nairobi. We had a Palestinian response to the Camp David talks within days – for Egypt is part of Africa. We were the first place to give an opportunity for the Zimbabwe political leaders to speak when they fled from Ian Smith. These are recent examples of a policy which the Centre has always attempted – to be alert in the face of changing Africa.

Films are held at the Africa Centre on Thursday evenings, either African in topic or directed by an African. We normally have an exhibition of paintings by an African artist on show in the main hall and in its gallery. I hope to encourage young African artists to hold their first exhibitions at the Centre. We are regularly used by Heinemann, Rex Collings and other publishers for book launches. The new African Poetry Prize is being introduced from the Africa Centre. The list of activities is very long, even without mentioning the countless occasions in the year when African organizations in London hire the place for dances or discothèques. The Centre is also available for hire to non-African concerns as long as there is no more appropriate competition.

I paint a picture of a thriving institution, a small part of Africa in the heart of London. Mostly this is fair, but the Africa Centre, being an independent voluntary organization, is not well endowed. You can become a member of the Centre for £5 a year (£2.50 to students, £25 for corporate membership), so that's one source of income. We own the valuable freehold of the property, letting some of it to the Africa Educational Trust and some to the Fund for Research and Investment in the Development of Africa (FRIDA), who also lease a shop on the premises selling Africanana. We receive some government grants and we have donations from businesses and trusts. But the Centre could do with more money to develop all the projects I hope to see off the ground during my tenure as Director-General.

We intend introducing more courses, especially non-academic ones for people who would like to know more about African life – perhaps because they are going on holiday there or because their company is becoming increasingly involved in Africa. Tourism and business orientation courses are a ripe field to cultivate. But our duty is just as much to Africans coming to London. We therefore need to publicise ourselves better, in Africa before people leave home as well as in London itself, for where else is a Hausa-speaker, for example, likely to find a congenial atmosphere the moment he arrives in England?

We shall be starting an Africa Centre journal, introducing a theatre company, and organizing conferences on trade unionism in Africa (jointly organized with the British Trade Union Movement) and on many other topics. We will have closer contact with schools and teachers, inviting them to the Centre where we have the first stages of a Resource Centre and also visiting

them to speak on African topics. There is no shortage of imagination or enthusiasm at the Centre, only funds and hence hands to carry out some of our more elaborate desires.

The Africa Centre welcomes all visitors to its eighteenth-century building at 38 King Street, Covent Garden, London W.C.2 (telephone 01-836-1973). Though much of the work goes on in seminars or at desks, you will sense the convivial atmosphere when you come and you may recognize that the modest efforts made by this Centre are in their way a contribution to the multi-racial society that Britain is becoming and which so many prophets say is doomed to disharmony. In turn it is a part of Africa's self-development. Its appeal is on these two fronts and I certainly can think of no place at which I would rather be working.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Mark O'Connor*, Australian poet, *Randolph Stow*, Australian poet and novelist, *Vibeke Stendrup*, research librarian, State Library, University of Aarhus; *Kirsten Holst Petersen*, teaches at University of Aarhus; *Felix Mathale*, Malawian poet, *Jack Mapanje*, Malawian poet; *Bernth Lindfors*, editor *Research in African Literature*, University of Texas at Austin; *Olat p'Bitek*, Ugandan poet, teaches at University of Nairobi; *Terry Goldie*, teaches at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada; *Robert Fraser*, reviews editor *West Africa* magazine; *Nisim Ezykief*, Indian poet, *Yasmine Gossens*, teaches at Macquarie University, N.S.W.; *Dorothy Livesey*, Canadian poet; *Michael Ayodele*, Nigerian artist (he is a Yoruba who studied under Twin Seven Seven and now lives in Zaria, Northern Nigeria); *Sven Poulsen*, Danish journalist and author of several books on Africa, *Jeanne Delbarré*, teaches at Free University of Brussels; *Christine Pagavalle*, teaches at University of Liège; *Alan Lawson*, teaches at University of Queensland; *Peter Afonk*, teaches at Massey University, New Zealand; *Johannes Riis*, teaches at University of Aarhus; *Erik Arne Hansen*, teaches at University of Aarhus; *Jon Carlsen*, teaches at University of Aarhus; *Nelias Watts*, teaches at University of Cologne; *Alastair Nham*, Director Africa Centre, London.

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### **BIRD, HAWK, BOGIE:**

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*Edited by Jeanne Dalgaard*

This is the first collection of essays to appear on Janet Frame. Each of her novels is discussed separately by one of the contributors. The book also contains an essay by the West Indian writer Wilson Harris, a substantial introduction by the editor and an annotated checklist of critical writings on Janet Frame.

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### **ENIGMA OF VALUES: an introduction**

*Edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford*

ENIGMA OF VALUES: an introduction contains a chapter describing the critical approach to literature of the West Indian writer and critic Wilson Harris. When he was guest lecturer in Commonwealth literature at Aarhus University, Denmark in 1973 Wilson Harris developed his ideas on the novel as an open form susceptible of renewal and traced attempts to break through the accepted conventions of fiction in works written in the last century or so. The other essays in this book offer interpretations of well-known novels, which take into account Wilson Harris's critical ideas.

*'Enigma of Values* is a welcome addition to those works of criticism that help »to widen and complicate the map of our sensibility«. Michael Gilkes in *Research in African Literature*.

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### **THE NAKED DESIGN**

*Hena Maes-Jelinek*

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